

## This Month's Liturgy;      March 2021

It is now one year since many of us were first introduced to the name of Coronavirus and learned of the impact which it would have – and continues to have – on our daily living and interaction. We are called upon to celebrate another Lent and quite possibly another Easter under the restrictions of Covid. What differences have you noticed?

One of the immediate impacts of us here in Rome is that the custom of the English-speaking community gathering for the **Station Masses** has been suspended. The Lenten Station Mass is an opportunity to gather each day in a different church of Rome for an early morning Mass – it recalls that the Bishop of Rome would gather with his people in the different parts of the city to encourage them in the observance of a good Lent. We all need that encouragement in these days, particularly as many of us may feel that we have been living a year-long Lenten journey, with an enforced 'fasting' from the company of those we love and a constant background sense of uncertainty, stress and worry.

That sense of the importance of gathering together is one which for many of us has been expressed and experienced only in a mediated or on-line community in these past months. We sometimes hear people refer to this as a 'virtual' community but I have a suspicion that using the word 'virtual' makes it seem less than real and therefore of only limited importance. It is a bit like the phrase '*social distancing*' – is it that we want to be distanced from society or from the social element of our lives, or really that what we actually mean is to be **physically** distanced?

We are not dealing with 'virtual' individuals but with real flesh and blood people, even if we are connected remotely and do not find ourselves physically in the same place or building. There is however something profoundly real about that which unites us – the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 'the sap of the Father's vine which bears fruit on its branches' (#1108).

Give thanks this Lent for those who have helped support you in the faith over these months. If you have internet access look at the Roman Stational Churches this Lent and - as the Holy Father asks us to do each Sunday at the end of the midday Angelus - don't forget to pray for him and indeed for all our bishops.

Fr Philip