



Diocesan Centre
Coursington Road
Motherwell
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Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS Bishop of Diocese of Motherwell

1st August 2020.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The recent review by the Scottish Government of the country's response to the Covid-19 pandemic has indicated that the present restrictions will remain as they are for some time to come. For our parish communities that means settling down with what has been put in place since the return of public worship and showing our desire to be exemplary in protecting each other from any possible spread of the virus.

In my reading I came across recently the phrase *spiritual integrity* and it made me ponder over some of the matters that some Catholics get troubled over and indeed write to me about. Since our experience of faith is deeply personal, and our perception of what is particularly meaningful to us in Catholic practice of that faith equally so, some aspects of how we do things may be of very great importance to one person but not so important to another. Each person has their own understanding of what is important and their *spiritual integrity* is adhered to in being faithful to what they believe. I have been thinking about this in particular at present since we have asked all those coming to Holy Communion at Mass to receive in the hand. For many people this is their normal practice and others who may prefer to receive on the tongue are happy to accept the present regulation, but for some part of their *spiritual integrity* has been to only receive communion on the tongue and they find the present restriction particularly difficult. I have thought this through wishing to reassure those who find it too difficult to receive communion in the hand that I understand the dilemma you face and would not wish to question your *spiritual integrity* in thinking this way. Can I offer any help?

I don't think the right answer is to come forward in the communion procession and put out your tongue. This imposes your dilemma on the minister giving out communion – they either accede to your demand against the present emergency regulation, or they decline to give you communion with the possible upset that may cause. There is *spiritual integrity* in play here also as part of our shared integrity as Catholics is to respect the rules put in place by the appropriate authority, which in the case of a Diocese, is the bishop. A respectful submission to the will of the Bishop in the present situation is asked for, even although there is some pain involved and some spiritual desolation.

Some spiritual consolation can be found in continuing to make a spiritual communion with Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist as was the lot of most Catholics as they followed the celebration of Mass on-line through the lockdown. I would suggest also that those who find it too difficult to receive communion in the hand should speak to their parish priest about their dilemma and ask if they can receive the Eucharist at another time. When the faithful are receiving Holy Communion as they leave Mass there is room to broaden the provision of distributing Holy Communion outside of Mass a bit further than in normal times.

At the public Masses I have celebrated in the last couple of weeks, the faithful have received Holy Communion as they have left Mass. I have felt touched by the respectful way this has been done and I commend everybody for their understanding of this enforced adaptation. Thinking about it spiritually it does give opportunity to heighten our awareness of bringing the Lord's presence from the Mass into the whole of our daily living. There is an opportunity also to extend our thanksgiving for the gift of the Eucharist into our homes and family life. Perhaps a short time of prayer could be set aside once we do reach home to give thanks together, including those from the household unable to attend Mass, and to seek the Lord's blessing on our homes and families. The gains from the increase in prayer and devotion in our homes which have been apparent during the lockdown can be consolidated and built upon now that it is possible to return to Mass and to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion.

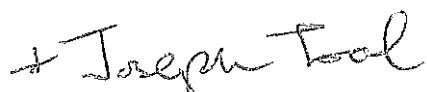
When we hear or read the Gospel this Sunday of Jesus feeding the multitude with the five loaves and two fish we are drawn to reflect on our own hunger for God's Word and for the Bread of Life in the Holy Eucharist. We thank the Lord for these wonderful gifts and we seek his healing and blessing for ourselves and our hungry world.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Joseph Toal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+ Joseph Toal