

## **A Lockdown Story.**

**In a Diocese not so far, far away, the Bishop of Pycchester and the Church of St Pythagoras & All Angles ‘do Church differently’ in this time of Covid-19 & Lockdown. Humour can be risky, so please pardon any offence, but here goes...**

**The performance of Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis by Pycchester Symphony Orchestra & Chorus in the Cathedral on Sat 14 March is moving & prophetic. The Agnus Dei feels like he couldn’t bear for the music to stop - playing extra time. We think it’s all over – it is now!**

**Lent 3 is ‘normal’. Fr Basil & the Choir sing Solemn Mass at St Pythag’s; the Howells’ Anthem is so beautiful. ‘Like as the hart... when shall I come before the presence of God?’ Indeed.**

**Basil’s wife, Mother Helen, shepherds her flock at Little St P’s, the Mission Shed down by the Riverside on the Allotments. They do Earthy Churchy, ‘you O Lord are the apple blossom of my eye’. Mutual flourishing.**

**Mothering Sunday but not as we know it - well-distanced private prayer in worried churches, flowers left outside to be taken from Gopak tables. Who would believe you’d be seeing Gopak in the PM’s Rose Garden in 2 months’ time?**

**Lockdown Monday – Bishops still have their Palace Chapels, but CofE clergy are banned from our Churches, for the first time in 800 years, people say. Only the peregrine falcons locked down on their eggs in the Spire notice Fr Basil re-lock St Pythag’s with a substantial package cradled in his arms.**

**Archbishop Justin Pediment, as they call him, insists it’s ‘like the earliest Christians’, but historians know it’s not, and tell him so. #ChurchAtHome tweet the opportunists with glee. #ChurchAtIKEA more like.**

**Bishops and others who remember the 6 Million Dollar Man from their teenhoods say, ‘We have the technology; we can rebuild the Church.’**

**Vicarage studies & kitchens across Pyfordshire become ad hoc recording studios, lest those helpful advisers at the Old Deanery try to centralise Worship & Liturgy. Most people, even those who don’t go to church, want to see their local Vicar – Prayer in the Community.**

**As Mtr Helen streams Morning Prayer for the Annunciation to St Pythag's Facebook page, the Church's much-loved statue of Our Lady of Walsingham has miraculously appeared in the Vicarage study.**

**Philosophers & quantum physicists may ponder whether Crosses & Statues were veiled this year, but if Passion Sunday feels this isolated, how will Holy Week feel, behind closed doors for fear of the virus.**

**With Confirmations postponed, nothing to bless, Suffragan Bishop Cindy House furloughs herself and returns to nursing, Stabat Mater Dolorosa juxta Covid lacrimosa. Better to be clapped as an NHS hero than criticised every week for passing on orders from Lambeth HQ.**

**Time for Bishop Ric Shaw to put weeks of prayer into practice with 20/20 foresight. Did you notice him in the streamed Chrism Mass, blessing a fourth oil alongside the 3 traditional ones – the new oil of hand sanitisation. He is also aware that Easter Communion will not happen for most, but what can he do?**

**A few Maundy Thursday streamed services encouraged folk to put their own bread and wine in front of their tablet or smartphone – isn't this what Jesus would do? But Bishops frown, theologians tremble, and it isn't repeated – well not openly.**

**Wisely very few priests stream family foot washing – just too creepy.**

**While Comms Teams all over England are spinning #ChurchAtHome as the best thing since unconsecrated sliced bread, Bp Ric hears the lament of his people longing for the Blessed Sacrament. But what can he do?**

**He feels like Pilate, washing his hands, saying the Lord's Prayer, his mind wanders – lead me not into temptation, but deliveroo ... – what if... a swift Ad Clerum wings its way to clergy across his diocese – numbers, addresses, is it possible, is it legal?**

**With commendable imagination, an Easter Vigil is live-streamed from drawing rooms & gardens around the Cathedral Close. Like a safari supper without food or fellowship. The Dean reads those fierce Old Testament passages 'horse & rider cast into the sea', the Precentor Exultets 'This is the unprecedented night...this naughty world...the work of bees,' but the Paschal Candle is ready on the Palace patio, waiting for**

**Bishop Ric to bless the fierce new fire and light a gentle flame for the Diocese.**

**‘Mrs Bishop’, author of racy ecclesiastical novels, looks on. Be careful, darling. The Bishop of Bristol’s Candle has just toppled over into the Palace fish-pond - gone viral on Twitter. She wonders what it could mean.**

**The Paschal Moon rises behind the ancient Cedar tree, seed brought back from the Lebanon by a Crusader the legend goes; more likely a Victorian plant hunter. Deep roots, firm trunk, the canopy battered by storms, broken and growing in different directions now, but still one tree – an image of the Church, or of a Marriage?**

**Ric could still light her candle if he wanted to, but he’s weighed down by the cares of the world and crowing corvid voices on every side.**

**Justin can’t see the problem. We may have the technology, but we’ve lost the theology, she muses. You didn’t always understand what Rowan said, but you knew it was beautiful & holy.**

**Easter Morning Eucharist, streamed from Bishop Ric’s Chapel, 5000 seems the right number of individually wrapped Communion wafers to consecrate. By next Sunday, his Deloveroo Deacons will have distributed them to the faithful, and he will lead a unique post-Easter Liturgy of the Presanctified. Pychester doing Church differently.**

**Sermon prologues also adapt to the times. As the Venerable Alan Bennett, Archdeacon Beyond the Fringe, might say, “Isn’t the Christian Life a bit like a Zoom Meeting? Jesus sends you the email invitation but you still have to click on the link. It may seem like he has forgotten you, left you in the waiting room of doom, but have faith and you will see him through a glass screen darkly, and he knows your needs in prayer even if your mike is muted.”**

**So, as Basil & Helen take their turn on the Pychester Churches’ weekly rota for online Compline, like the Two Ronnies, ‘it’s a quiet night from me’ – ‘and a perfect end from him’.**

