

Reflections on our Zoom Services

I have really enjoyed and been encouraged by joining in our Sunday morning services via Zoom. In fact, I have enjoyed them more than going to Church. I have been eager to get us connected to the Zoom meeting well before 10 o'clock, but often I have not looked forward to going to Church. Clearly this does not sound right, so I have reflected on why this should be.

Firstly, I enjoy the period of welcome and "hello" when participants are being added into the meeting. We greet each other enthusiastically, even if we are only waving or if Zoom is scrambling who is greeting who. There is a genuine warmth being conveyed. I am reminded of Jesus's words in Matthew 18 v 3. In response to the question: who is the greatest, he said: *unless you become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven*. There is a childlike (not childish) openness and enthusiasm to our greetings, which is disarming and endearing.

Secondly, I have found it very easy to focus on the Minister during their homily and the celebration of Communion. I can see them clearly and find myself watching and listening intently. In Church, I have to confess, my thoughts will often stray to worries about the future of our building; the relevance of some of our liturgical traditions or the hope that everything will go smoothly. But in our Zoom service I am not confronted by those matters. I appreciate however that others, who have a deeper sacramental theology than I do, will have greatly missed the physical taking of communion. For them, a virtual service is no substitute. I also appreciate that I have been able to enjoy and benefit from these services because all the clergy who have led them from their homes bring great experience of life and ministry to their role. They have conducted the services with a deep simplicity which, for me, has communicated across the internet. Thank you.

The third reason why I have enjoyed our Zoom services is that they have enabled me to get to know more people in the congregation. I have been going to St Marys for 25 years, but there are many members of the congregation, both old stalwarts and more recent members, who I don't know but feel I should. At the end of services in Church, I am too embarrassed to say: what is your name? Have you been coming for long? Some may not want that conversation immediately after a service. In contrast, Zoom has provided me with an image and a name (not always their own, I appreciate) so I have learnt to put names to some familiar and slightly newer faces. In addition, I have enjoyed joining in the random chat groups Zoom enables at the end of the service. You know that the others in the chat room want to talk and there seems plenty to talk about. So I have got to know some folk better than I would have done going to Church.

So for me our Zoom services have been a positive and enjoyable experience. Thank you so much Den (Cordrey) for taking the initiative and shouldering the responsibility of managing our Zoom meetings each week. It has been a great work of service to us all. Despite these positive feelings, I am very conscious that there are a good many faithful members of our congregation who have not been able to join in with Zoom. They have been missing the sense of fellowship that we have (I hope) experienced and we are missing their presence. I know that Zoom can't be the permanent future. But as our Church slowly reopens for services, I hope that some of the positive aspects I have found through Zoom may transfer back to the Church setting and that I can continue to get to know more members of our congregation. So don't be too surprised if I ask: *and what is your name?*

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