

Much essential goodness has been revealed in these past four weeks of 'lock-down'. We have been checking on others to see if they are 'all right' and many more have been checking on us to see if we are all right. It's been quite touching and sometimes inspiring; voices from long ago suddenly made present, bringing with them a host of memories, some pleasant, some more troubled, but all suddenly good to hear. I wonder if we can see Jesus' re-visiting of his disciples after his death in a similar light? He's checking them out, showing his care for them, gently bringing them back to their true selves, to what is essential to being human: contact, companionship, breaking bread together. Does this make sense, perhaps, of that much used term now, *spiritual communion*? Not a communion in thought only – 'we'll remember you in our prayers' – valid as this might be, but a reaching out where we can to remind others, in a very physical sense, that we care for them, that we can still have communion without breaking bread together.

St Benedict begins his little rule for beginners by identifying four sorts of monks; the cenobites, such as us, living together in community under the rule of an abbot; the hermits who, having served their apprenticeship in such communities, are ready to face the isolation of the desert; the dreadful sarabaites who essentially do what they want under the guise of monasticism, and the gyrovagues who wander from place to place enslaved 'to their own wills' but especially to 'the enticements of the belly'. Perhaps they all represent parts of ourselves but St. Benedict is clear that the best are the cenobites, those living in community and so tested and proven in the crucible that they can then survive isolation if needs be.

So I wonder whether Jesus' checking out of his various disciples and gathering them back into one fold, cannot be seen in this light also. Community is the place where we flourish – there's no getting away from the need to be Church – but this gathering, if valid, can equip us for the desert, whether this be chosen, as in mission, or enforced, as is happening to so many people now; it's a training place for 'spiritual communion', whether this simply takes the form of prayer, or getting in touch by phone, or letter, or a wave through the window. And its validity depends on a Christ who has risen and visits us still in our 'visits' to one another – physical or otherwise.

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