

## Column

This past week I did something I had not done in a long, long time -- seven weeks to be exact. I shook hands. The way it came about, the son of a former church member -- a micro-biologist no less -- was up for a visit and stuck out his hand, and I responded in kind.

I felt as if I had done something immoral or illegal. I looked around for the germ gestapo to pounce and carry me away. Even so, there was something good and right about this act, even if I did dutifully spray my hands with 70 percent alcohol before eating or touching my face.

Why might something so simple and once so common as a handshake feel good and right? I think the short answer is: God made us this way. We are incarnate beings and were created for incarnate encounters.

Virtual reality has certainly been wonderfully helpful during the coronavirus crisis. People have been able to stay safe and connected. During Lent and Easter-tide, we at St. Luke's have been able to join together weekly, not only with those in our parish area who are not able to get out, but with people around the world. Some are old friends now living elsewhere but many others are new friends.

Indeed, as I look into the camera, I can see some of these old friends. One couple I can count on being present are former neighbours who are now living in Tampa, Fla. In my mind's eye, I see them sitting in their courtyard with their dog Bella, perhaps with a cup of coffee in hand. (When I speak with them by telephone, I warn the wife not to be making faces at me during the broadcast, trying to make me laugh!)

As marvellous as modern technology is, there is a danger. That danger is that we as individuals and as a society will become disincarnated, that we shall be content to live in a world of virtual reality. Even when the door of the bird cage is opened, we shall not -- either out of fear or habit -- exit and fly free.

Worship in the spirit is vital, but so is worship in the flesh. God after all in the person of His Son Jesus has taken on real flesh. At the Last Supper, our Lord gave His followers real bread and wine, and said: 'Take and eat', 'Take and drink' . . . 'This is my body', 'This is my blood'.

The exhortation of the author of Hebrews remains relevant: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

I like the way one modern translation puts the writer's words: "Don't stay away from your meetings." Incarnate beings require incarnate fellowship, and this includes -- when safe and appropriate -- handshakes and hugs.

*ALMIGHTY God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with stedfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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