

*“From lightning and tempest; from earthquake fire and flood; from plague, pestilence, and famine, Good Lord, deliver us.”  
- The Great Litany*

This year somehow, this petition from the Great Litany seems particularly relevant, doesn't it? We've already had fire and earthquake, flood and pestilence and we're only two months into the year!

We'll be saying/singing the Litany this morning for our first Sunday of Lent. It used to be a regular feature of an Anglican Sunday, but it has fallen out of use generally and is used at most only one or two times a year. And that's a pity.

Pay close attention to it this morning as we go through it; it's a powerful, moving text, and reminds us, among other things, of the fragility of our existence as humans, how much we depend on God, we need God. It is certainly sobering, and it's not at all surprising that people today avoid it – it makes us feel very uncomfortable. All this makes a very good way to start Lent.

Speaking of 'plague and pestilence' we are presently confronted with the challenge of the corona virus (covid-19) which will almost inevitably get worse before it gets better. We have no idea how it will ultimately affect us here, but in the meantime we can only pray ... and act sensibly.

The Litany takes care of the praying bit this morning; for the sensible side, I have appended here the most recent guidelines for parishes from the Church of England.

*“Churches should already be following best-hygiene practices that include advising parishioners with coughs and sneezes to refrain from handshaking during The Peace and to receive Communion in one kind only.*

At present, there is no Government advice that suggests the use of the Common Cup should be suspended. It is also best practice for churches to have hand sanitisers available for parishioners to use.

In addition, priests presiding at the Eucharist, communion administrators and servers should wash their hands, preferably with an alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand sanitiser.

Intinction is not recommended (even by celebrants or communion-administrators) as this represents an infection transmission route as well as a risk to those with certain allergies. Best hygiene practice should continue to be observed in all pastoral contacts.”

Should things get worse – and God grant that they do not – no doubt other measures will be needed. For now, the above guidelines – and prayer – should be enough.