

GAS Letter for July 2020 Intercession Paper

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

The July number of our Intercession Paper always begins with us looking forward to our Annual Requiem in November, and I hope that all who can will make plans to be with us for the next Annual Requiem at the Guild's National Shrine, the Church of the Resurrection, 119 East 74th Street, just east of Park Avenue, on Saturday, 14 November 2020 at 11.00 a.m. Our professional choir under the direction of Organist and Choir Master David Enlow, a member of the Council of the Guild, can be counted upon to do their usual superlative job. A luncheon will be served afterwards in our guild hall for those minded and able to remain.

I wrote the first paragraph two months or so ago, just to have a stored beginning to this letter. What a change two months can make. We can no longer make any of those announcements with any degree of certainty. All of this assumes, of course, that life will have returned to something like the semblance of what we knew at the end of February. That is a big assumption, I'm afraid, and writing this letter as I am at the very end of April, it is far from certain when or if travel (and indeed masses of this sort which we are currently prohibited by law from having, since professional musicians are not indispensable employees officially, nor can we have more than 10 in church), will be possible again. As has been the case for a few months now, we shall have to react on the spot to what it is possible for us to do. At the very bottom end of the scale, there will be a Low Mass with hymns and a sermon from me, broadcast from my own church, which is what we have been doing the past several Sundays. Whatever is possible above that, we shall do. I am not, of course, inviting an outside preacher at this point, since it would not be possible for him to make any kind of real commitment. Likewise, Mr Enlow has not chosen a Requiem Mass setting, as it is uncertain whether it will be possible for us to offer it. I am afraid my own personal fear, which unlike the vague opinions of others expressed in public, has some basis in science and medical history, is that we shall lower our guard considerably and that also if this virus dislikes warm weather (and that is consonant with many others of the same type), those two factors may cause it to come roaring back in the autumn. That was certainly the case with the Spanish influenza, which was worse on the second visitation than the first. Should that be the case, all these plans will go awry.

It is not really in my remit, but I urge you to follow the guidelines, requests and orders of the jurisdiction you are in, and if you are in one that has become known for laxity, think of following those in places which are more observant. I feel as though I can give this advice since you will remain members of the Guild no matter what, but I wish to move as few as possible from active living members to those **for whom** we are praying! Whilst the Guild promises absolutely to pray for you when you have moved on to the next stage of your life, journeying closer to God, it is neither our hope nor intention to see you hasten that time!

Should it not be possible for us to have our statutory meeting of the Council in November, we shall do so electronically, and at the very least be able to elect new members to the Guild who have applied, elect or re-elect Council Members and the Officers of the Guild, and transact any other pressing business. The Guild did not meet in 1918 or 1919 (owing to the Spanish influenza epidemic), or in 1943 or 1944 owing to the Second World War and the scarcity and difficulty of public transportation, and the rationing of tyres and petrol.

On all these occasions, the Council voted on various matters and elected officers by paper ballots in the post, which were all sent out by the Secretary-Treasurer General. Should this be necessary, we shall do so by the modern equivalent. We are determined, however, to be able to do as much as we are able, given whatever situation we are in.

We intend to be guided by the civil authorities, by which I mean the Governor of New York in whose jurisdiction these decisions are, in whom we are very fortunate as New Yorkers and whom we know is guided by medical advice and science, and also guided by the advice of the Diocese and general practice of other churches in it. I cannot tell you how this will develop as I lost my crystal ball a few years ago. Having been here in the city every day, every minute, since this started, I understand completely the frustration and near desperation of many of you, both here and elsewhere, who cannot see the future and despair of what the results could possibly be. Like you, I wonder when this will all end and how? And what will be left? How will life change? What will our city or your home town be like? I offer you no idiotic bromides or consolation, because they would be worthless. I know no more than you do.

But I can tell you what I do know. I know that Christ is Risen. I know that God loves us. I know that God holds us in the palm of his hand. I know that God has the power to heal anything and anybody. I know that the seeds of new life and blessing are sown in the fields of every tragedy. I know that the Good Shepherd is at work and that we are the sheep of his pasture. Those are not unique insights; it is simply what the Guild of All Souls has taught from the beginning and it is part of the bedrock of the assurance of Hope in this life and in that which is to come, promised in the Creeds.

Look after yourself and your health. Look after those who specially pertain to you. Help look after those who are strangers to you but in need. Pray for the dead: not simply our Guild's dead as we have promised to do, but pray for all those who have lost their lives around the world to this latest scourge of pestilence. We are not accustomed to speaking in this way, but such is the truth of things now, and it behoves us and everyone else not to pretend as though it were not.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

The Reverend Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC
Superior-General