
English Catholics and the lockdown: closer to God but distant from parish churches

They attended the Mass livestreamed during the lockdown, but the majority prefer presence-based experience over “technological” experience. In fact they believe that the bishops did well to insist that the government reopen the churches. However, isolation has made them feel “closer to God.” Two-thirds have discontinued economic support to the Church and have not thought about the impact it will have on the resumption of liturgical and pastoral life. These are the views of British Catholics at the time of the coronavirus according to a survey carried out by Professor Francis Davis, University of Birmingham and Oxford, in collaboration with “Catholic Voices”, a group of Catholic experts promoting Church thought in British media. “We sought to explore the impact the coronavirus crisis on the faithful of England and Wales and their pastors,” Davis told SIR. “The findings bring together the answers to 1200 online questions. The questionnaire was distributed in the parishes and is accessible online until the end of June.”



Immagine non disponibile

Based on the answers given by interviewees, the majority of nearly five million Catholics in Britain (51%) believe that the bishops responded well to the crisis caused by Covid-19 while 62% are convinced that closing the churches was not an exaggerated measure. Many respondents have not yet considered the impact that the economic disaster will have on the Church. A fraction of respondents said they will resume community life; others, who have stopped supporting the parish financially, are ready to resume such support once community life restarts. Over 50% of Catholics said the lockdown helped them feel closer to God (51%) and eager to pray (55%). More than three-quarters felt encouraged after attending Masses streamed from their parish churches. **The economic data.** “I think most of the faithful will return to the church at the end of the lockdown,” Davis said (in the photo). “The problem will be that the churches will lack the funds that were available before the Covid, three months ago. Even if the faithful are willing to support the Church, many will not be in a position to do so because they will have lost their jobs. That's why a plan is needed, in every diocese, one that takes into account this critical period that will continue for at least a whole year. Only in this way will it be possible to obtain a loan from the banks for the expenses incurred by the parishes. Unfortunately, in this difficult situation, some churches will have to close.” **The good habits...** The same view is shared by **Catherine Brady**, a laywoman serving the diocese of Nottingham. “I sit on a commission created by Bishop Patrick McKinney, tasked with keeping track of parish life, seeking to ascertain what is happening and what lies ahead,” she said. “There are about fifteen of us, working in various parts of the diocese, we meet every two weeks on Zoom. Since the lockdown began, we have been facing two major problems. The discontinuation of liturgical and pastoral life and the economic consequences. With the closure of churches, some parish priests unfamiliar with IT tools did not even stream Mass online, thus the life of the Christian community stopped altogether. Only

two out of more than a hundred parishes have a Facebook group where messages can be posted. There is a website, but it does not contribute to the life of the community which, in England, also depends on the habit of having coffee in the parish hall after each service and fundraising events."

Risk of closure. In Catherine Brady's parish, Saint Mary's in Loughborough, central England, about six hundred people go to church, but the Facebook group has only 146 members and there are no elderly people, the most affected by isolation during this crisis. Many may not return when the church reopens. Many parishes are also in danger of closing, according to Brady: "in Saint Mary's we are losing about 3,500 Euros a month in missing offerings, and the church building requires 5,500 to stay open."

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