

Good King Wenceslas maintains Social Distance

Good King Wenceslas looked out. It made a welcome relief from looking at the dispiriting rows of figures on his laptop showing a marked decline in palace revenues. He had no need to wonder whose Saint's day it was – the archbishop had declared that for the whole month the people should pray daily to St Corona for deliverance from the pestilence affecting the country. Corona was a lady of undoubted purity and virtue though everything else about her is uncertain. Perhaps she could help restore the royal finances, the King wondered.

The '*Sancti Mirabilia Coronae*' a fourteenth century book, believed to have inspired Julian of Norwich to have become an anchorite, tells us that she was born in probably either the fourth or fifth centuries (though other authorities differ) and was revered because during a time of great pestilence she tried many experimental potential cures on herself. These included elixirs made from bats' droppings and mink skins, then a substance believed to be a forerunner of modern bleach. These did not seem particularly successful apart from making the saint extremely ill, and her recoveries were deemed miraculous. More efficacious was shutting herself away and shunning all contact with the world, apart from receiving weekly deliveries of food by cart. As a result of others following her example the pestilence declined, and on emerging from her cell, she was subsequently seen in town with a stick almost twice her own height which she used to keep others at a distance.

So it was on a feast of St Corona that the good king looked out. He frowned at what he saw. 'Hither page,' he called, 'and stand - just over there. Yonder peasants sitting close together on that bench. They are not maintaining social distance, they've no masks, and are they allowed there in any case?' 'Ah, Sire,' replied the page, 'the palace gardens are in Tier 2d, which means they are private open spaces and may be used freely by people within the associated house's support bubble, whereas if the gardens were in tier 2c, it would have been a different story.'

'Talking about social distancing – has there been any progress yet?', the king enquired. 'We believe we are on the verge of a breakthrough,' replied the page. 'Well no more Magnify meetings until you do,' said the king firmly.

What concerns his majesty, you may well wonder, dear listener. Allow me to explain.

One blessing that the King had initially looked for from the attempts to deal with the unseen menace, was the cancellation of his weekly meetings with his Prime Minister, or indeed of having to hold any meetings involving the political classes. Such hopes had been dashed by the rapid introduction of Magnify – which enabled participants to hold online meetings via computers from the safety of home or palace.

His first meeting had not been successful. 'If you can you see and hear me all right please wave your spoons,' the king read from a prepared script. The PM was waving his spoon emblazoned with the parliamentary cipher and the king could also see a forest of spoons waving in the background. (Ask Helen if you don't understand the spoon allusion). 'Who are those others in the room?' asked the King – 'Oh my advisers,' said the PM airily, 'they tend

to know the details of things.’ Yes, unlike you, thought the King, ‘and so they can see me too?’ he asked as an afterthought. ‘Yes indeed sire, just as well as me, you are upclose and personal for them,’ he laughed.

‘This will not do, page,’ the king said firmly after the session was over. ‘We cannot continue meetings like this.’ ‘But sire,’ said the page, ‘this is the best if not the only way to meet and maintain social distancing.’ ‘Social Distancing!’ exploded the King. ‘It does nothing of the sort. When the PM used to come here for his audience, I sat here and he sat there, a suitable distance apart. On Magnify we might as well have been sitting on the sofa next to each other! And those guys in his entourage, could see me just as clearly as he could. When the court meets everyone stands or sits according to their social status and precedence. No one gets that close to me without my express invitation. Social distancing – this is social anarchy! The king needs regal mystery, page, approached with awe and deference. I am not the world’s bosom pal! Get this changed page, you have an army of nerds somewhere. No more Magnify here until we have proper distancing!’

A few days later, the page brought news of glad tidings to the king. ‘We have fixed it.’ sire he said. ‘Magnify just needs this add-on app, which I have downloaded onto your laptop. Because we have a list of all who can contact you on Magnify, we can calculate their relative social status to yourself sire, and the app reduces your size on their screen so that it appears just as it would do if they had been physically present at that distance. We call it the SOD app Socially Organised Distancing. And you just use voice control to activate it. Shall we try it with the next meeting with the PM?’

‘So, I just click on ‘join now’ as usual,’ said the king, ‘and how do I turn the distancing app on?’ ‘Just command it to come on,’ replied the page. ‘Right ‘Socially Organised... ‘ ‘the abbreviation will do ...’ interjected the page, ‘oh OK, so SOD ON.’ The King was delighted to see the PM fiddling with his laptop and camera, as too it seemed were his advisors in the background. ‘Anything the matter PM?’ asked the King. ‘Most strange Sire, came the reply, you seem much further away than last time.’ There was a vigorous waving of spoons in the background. ‘Well never mind,’ said the King, ‘don’t let little things like this stop us eh.’

The meeting eventually ended with the now iconic words: ‘Thank you, good-bye and SOD OFF.’

‘Excellent’ chortled the King to the page, ‘and I’ve realised this could be a money spinner for us. Take out a patent for the palace, page, and we can sell the system to any hierarchically based organisation.’ ‘Better still to licence the app sire, so then we have a continual revenue stream.’ ‘Fine, make it so, page, make it so.’

So in this way the blessed St Corona helped to restore the royal finances, and this is also why dear listener, when any minister or church warden engages in a Magnify meeting with the Archdeacon or Bishop, they discover anew that the ranks of the heavenly host are indeed exactly that, and the church, being a microcosm of the heavenly realm on earth, maintains due deference to all in authority. So too, though not sanctioned in Scripture or Common Worship, the words SOD OFF have become part of the dialogue between the church and humankind, but of course spoken reverently and prayerfully.

So good Christian men be sure
To maintain your social distance
Magnify keeps your rank secure
But you need the app's assistance

Thank you all and SOD OFF.