

Brave new words

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“YOU SHALL KNOW a word by the company it keeps,” said the British linguist J.R. Firth years ago. He was talking about the way one word associates with another. *Spick?* You know *span* will come next. *Auburn?* *Hair.* *Green with?* *Jealousy.* In the linguistics world, they’re called “collocations”. *Spick* “collocates” with *span*. You get the idea.

Words can have several collocations. So, to *The Tablet’s* world. What collocates with *Mass*? *Holy ... Sunday ... daily ... High ... sung ... say ... serve ... go to ...* These are the traditional ones, some of which date back to the earliest days of English. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* talks about someone saying “High Mass on Easter Day”.

So what about *Easter*? I suppose for most it’s *egg* and *bunny*. Probably *break*, *holiday* or *vacation*. *Parade* in some places – remembering especially the 1948 film with Judy Garland and Fred Astaire. The days of the week – *Easter Sunday*, *Monday*, and so on. And Tableteers also have *candle*, *services*, and *vigil*.

But over the past few years, new collocations have emerged with *Mass*, such as *online*, *streaming*, *recorded* and *live-streamed*. *Livestream Mass* is a heading on the Westminster Cathedral website. In addition to the traditional *hear Mass*, we can now *watch Mass*.

Moving from collocation to co-location, this is what the Westminster Cathedral website says about streaming: “The Cathedral’s streaming facility enables



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those who cannot attend in person to share fully in the daily liturgies and to feel part of our community of faith.” These are the realities that the collocations reflect. And they raise interesting questions about communication. For how *can* we “share fully” and “feel part”? Priests (and ministers of the Word and Communion) need to make a special effort to integrate those watching online. Having seen the process operating in several churches, I’ve noted two common practices. The first is that no acknowledgement of those watching online is made at all; the second, the celebrant welcomes the physically present congregation with a “Good morning” or whatever, and

extends the welcome to those watching online. And that’s it.

I can think of several other places where those watching online could be acknowledged: during the homily, in the Prayers of the Faithful, where a prayer for the online community could be a routine feature and individual petitions from people who regularly watch online could be read out; at the sign of peace, where the celebrant could wish peace to the watchers, for example. (And a “donate” button on the website for the collection perhaps?)

To foster online participation, those leading a service need to be aware of how they’re going to be seen and heard. There can be a problem if a camera intermediary plays at being a TV producer, zooming uncertainly around. When we’re in church, in our pew, we sense the entirety of the setting, and make allowances for angles of vision. It should be the same online, with the whole altar present to those sitting in their home “pew” at home. Leaders need to remember that their voice is all the online watcher hears. The “voice” of the congregation is often inaudible to those participating online. So it’s important to say all the words of a unison prayer, such as the Creed.

As Miranda almost says, in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: “O brave new world, that has such Easter people in’t.”

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