

Fifth Sunday of Lent A – 2020

St Michael's Church, Kildysart

Spring is a lovely time of year, it is the season when so many beautiful things return –

- Light returns, the days get longer, the clocks went forward last night
- colour returns – the daffodils, primroses, buds on the trees
- the sounds and sights of spring return– lambs frolicking in the fields, birds singing and starting to make their nests, soon the swallows will be here.

Yet, all these beautiful, grace filled, wonderful sights and sounds struggle to lift hearts that are weighted down by worry and sadness.

There is darkness in our world, in our hearts, in our lives. First, we heard of an illness in China and perhaps we didn't take too much notice. Then it came closer and reached our own community of nations. Italy and especially Lombardy and the beautiful cities of Bergamo and Brescia have been crippled with pain and death. As the weeks went by, the stench of death came closer and closer.

Despite the vibrant colour and light of spring, it is so very hard to see beyond the darkness and silence. We feel it in the air, we notice it in people's faces. Our streets and roads are empty, our shops and schools are closed, our Churches empty. Hand sanitizer has replaced Holy Water. People are scared to leave the safety of their homes. We find ourselves alone and lost.

Our natural instinct is to come together in times of crisis, to reach out to each other: to gather in each other's shadow, to share the warmth and strength that comes from human companionship. But we know only too well that the one thing that would save us in other circumstances would now spread illness, pain and even death. We can't stand shoulder to shoulder, we can't grasp hands, embrace or hug. But we can still love, we can still care, we can still pray.

Pope Francis shared a beautiful reflection in an empty St Peter's Square on Friday last. He reminded us that we are not alone in these days of fear - we have companions on the journey. Our lives are woven together in so many ways. It is the courage and goodness of ordinary people which is writing the history of our world in these days – doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers, shop staff, caregivers, transport operators, drivers, gardaí, neighbours, family, friends and so many others.

We will get over this together – we have no hope otherwise. In the words of the Pope 'by ourselves we flounder'. In these strange times, we help each other best by staying apart – by 'phoning, texting, e mailing an offer to help or a word of friendship and encouragement, by leaving the shopping you collect for an elderly neighbour on his/her doorstep rather than handing it to him/her.

The Gospel for Mass today gives paints a picture of the beautiful friendship that Jesus had with Martha, Mary and Lazarus. We see him come to them in their hour of need. He tells the 'whoever believes in the Lord will have life'. We pray for life. May love and hope push out pain and fear. We pray for the gift of faith and perseverance – these terrible days will come to an end. There will come a day when life will seem carefree once again – when we will laugh again, spend time together, hold hands, hug, enjoy sport; children will return to school and the routine of work, family and friends will once again punctuate our days.

There was a new moon last Tuesday. It was what is known as a micro moon. Because of the position of the earth, the moon looks smaller that it normally does. But it was still there and it made the night less dark. We celebrate Easter in two weeks time when the moon is full and will truly illuminate the night. The light of the risen Christ will dispel the darkness, illuminate our path and guide out steps.

May these thoughts help us during these dark days. What the Lord said to his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus in today's gospel, he also says to us, because we are also his friends.

'We will once again see the glory of God'.

Albert McDonnell