

Homily: 6th Sunday of Easter 2020

You can't help but notice in this past week, life is stirring again. More people about, more traffic on the roads, encouragement to go back to work, if you can't work from home. Talk of some children back to school in June, churches and other places opening in July: **signs of hope**.

When our Bishop Mark wrote a pastoral Message to the diocese a few weeks ago, he reminded us that when he wrote before Easter, he had described this period we are living through as "a long Good Friday". He went on to say 'that is still true, in so many ways, how much each of us is having to live the Paschal Mystery, participating in a very real way in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.

Those words are with me now, for although I daily celebrate an Eastertide Mass, and the Paschal Candle is lit, it still feels somewhat 'not quite right'. The scriptures each day, and those for today, all come to our aid. The daily and Sunday gospels from St John, chapters 14, 15 & 16, could be entitled 'motives for consolation'. In lockdown it is well worth reading them all through.

They were spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, when he was preparing his disciples for his suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and his return to the Father, to console them in their sadness and confusion.

From last Sunday's gospel he appeals to them to continue to trust him. His departure must not shake their faith, as in fact he is going to the Father to prepare a place for them, where there will be plenty of room.

That is the **first motive of consolation**; no shortage of space, as Jesus comes to take to himself those who live according to his way.

So Thomas' question allows Jesus to assert, as we reflected last week "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life". He is the way whose teaching guides our behaviour and shows us how to live. He is the Truth in whom the searching mind will find ultimate meaning and satisfaction. He is the Life who has conquered death and offers eternal life to all who accept his way and truth. There is no other way to the Father but through Jesus.

Jesus then promises even greater days ahead, which is a **second motive for consolation or hope**, even greater works through the power of our prayer.

The **third consolation** is the promise of the Holy Spirit, as the *Paraclete* (Greek) or *Advocatus* (Latin) meaning someone called beside you. The Holy Spirit is God's love ever beside us, the divine friend who whispers comfort to the heart and light to the mind. To be comforted literally means to be strong with (*cum-fortis*) the support of somebody. A comforter is one who brings inner strength. How many of us as children had some blanket or toy or something as a 'comforter?'

The promise of Jesus is that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, would give immense strength to all who believe. The eternal truth of the Word of God is the source of unflinching strength in the face of all contradiction.

The **fourth motive for consolation** is the promise of Jesus not to leave his followers orphaned. In a little while they would no longer have his physical presence. To the unbeliever this would be similar to being orphaned. But people who believe in Jesus and keep his commandments, would be raised by adoption into divine life, given power to become children of God.

I'm always reminded of this, when at funerals, in the invitation to prayer before the final commendation it says, 'He/she was adopted as God's son/daughter in baptism and was nourished at the table of the Lord; may he/she now inherit the promise of eternal life and take his/her place at the table of God's children in heaven.'

With our closed churches and the lockdown continuing, we can feel quite the weight of all this, and the need for **consolation and hope**. We are cut off from the sacraments, especially the Body and Blood of Christ to feed and nourish us. But he is always with us. At the moment you are not physically able to receive him: but his presence is always with us. That is a great source for our **hope**.

At the same time as Bishop Mark's message, we also received one from all the Archbishops of England and Wales, entitled "**A people who Hope in Christ**" (both on the website) which spoke about the many shadows cast into our lives, and upon the world, the light of the resurrection shines forever to renew and restore our **hope**.

Her Majesty the Queen at Easter said that the Easter message was one of **new hope**.

St Peter in the opening words of our Second Reading today ‘Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the **hope** that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience.’

Lockdown often presents opportunities to talk with others, seeing them, or on the phone or other ways of communication. Use well those moments. **Hope**, is the neglected of the triad, faith hope and love, but they are bound together. People need **Hope**, as well as **faith** and **love**.

Christian **hope** is grounded on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we pray daily ‘as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.’

All I have said came beautifully together in the 2nd Reading at the Office of Readings for yesterday, the 5th Saturday of Easter, from a discourse of St Augustine on the Psalms.(148:1-2) Here is some of it to reflect on.

The Paschal Alleluia. The praise of God should be the object of our meditation in this life, because in the life to come it will be forever the object of our rejoicing. No one will be fit to receive the life to come unless they have prepared in this life to receive it. And so in this life we do not only praise God: we make petitions to him. Our praise is expressed with joy, our petitions with sighs. For we have been promised that we shall receive what we do not yet possess; and since he is true to his promises, we rejoice in **hope**; but since we have not yet received what he promised, we sigh in longing. It is good for us to persevere in longing, until the promise comes true and sighing is a thing of the past, and unalloyed joy takes its place.

There are then two ages: the first is the present age, which consists of the temptations and tribulations of this life; the second is the future age, which consists of everlasting peace and rejoicing.

So too we celebrate two seasons, one before Easter and one after.

The season before Easter (Lent) signifies the tribulation in which we now live: the present season after Easter signifies the happiness which will be ours hereafter. What we celebrate before Easter we already experience; what we celebrate after Easter signifies that we do not yet possess what we celebrate. And so we keep the season before Easter in fasting and prayer, but in the present season we relax our fast and devote ourselves to praise. This is the meaning of the Alleluia we sing.

Both of these truths are symbolised and expressed in the life of Christ our head. The Lord's passion reminds us of our state of need in this present life, in which we have to toil and suffer and finally die.

The Lord's resurrection and his glorification reveal to us the life which is destined to be ours. So now, brothers and sisters, I urge you to praise God; this is what we all say to one another when we say Alleluia. Praise the Lord.

Praise God with the whole of yourselves; it is not only your tongue and your voice that should praise him, but your conscience, your life, your deeds. Alleluia, Praise the Lord, and be joyful in hope.