

Reflection from Fr. Colm on Palm Sunday

Audio posted to the Parish Website on Saturday 4th April 2020

Good morning everybody, this lovely morning I greet you from the presbytery here at St Joseph's in the parish of the Durham Martyrs and to all the parishioners and others I'd like to greet you especially on this Holy Week as we begin tomorrow with the Passion or today with the Passion of Jesus. Early enthusiasm has shifted quickly to the cross and a radical change has taken place - flowers to mud. From making popular headlines to the isolation of the cave, He was hemmed in by betrayal, by sin, pride and greed and there was no answer. "My God, My God" - no help, why? It happens us in a watered down way perhaps but for Him it was intense, and it was immediate. Darkness sets in, hope is lost, but *is it?*

For so many this is their story. Now, especially. A virus sweeps across our globe, across of our own very neighbourhoods. We too will have a lot of "whys" to ask. Why weren't we ready? Why can't a vaccine be found? Why can't we meet our loved ones? And these questions of why greet each other on a daily basis no more so than in the constant storm of tragic news that we get from the various news channels. But while hope was lost, it was quickly recovered in the Easter story, indeed not only recovered, it rose again.

But let's get back to that crowd. The crowd cheered initially, welcoming Him. That mass enthusiasm. We are so brave in a crowd, aren't we? As one man, a great philosopher said, *"The crowd, the great enemy of reason, virtue and religion, that numerous piece of monstrosity, which taken asunder seems men, and reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make one great beast."* We see it often, but a crowd is not a community.

These past few weeks we have been deprived of our own community, especially our parish community and may be deprived of it into the foreseeable future. Added to this is the pain of not being able to meet the very members of our own families, confined to our own homes. Of course, we read, we garden, watch television. We can even compensate for our lack of exercise outside the home by home physical exertion as directed by fitness guru Joe Wicks or have all our best efforts at keeping fit and weight down as that other guru Jamie Oliver teaches us how to

bake comfort snacks and put the weight back on again. All diversions and *good* but none of this is people - flesh and blood - people. Our community and especially our Church community.

And that community is the familiar face that sits near me in church. Perhaps I don't even know his or her name, but I do miss them. I miss even their odd ways, their eccentricities, I miss too the warm smiles of greeting when we meet on a Sunday from others and surprise, surprise yes, I even miss those grumpy faces. I also miss the hymns, even the ones I don't like. I miss the choir, the music group, I also miss the coffee after Mass, those precious moments to catch up, the bit of gossip, the small talk and perhaps some occasion the deeper sharing of a particular worry or concern. I miss them all, deeply. And yes, I even miss the tedious sermons.

The Journalist Tim Stanley said on "Thought for the day" this week that recently how he always went to Mass with a very clear understanding that Mass was just a matter between him and God and on hearing that his parish Mass was suspended he looked forward to the many websites he could access Mass from home. However, after the first such screened Mass things changed. Yes, the priest was very good, but something was missing. He simply missed the people, the community.

We all miss each other and so we should. Isn't it a testimony to the strength of that same community, warts and all, that we miss it? And so, we enter this Holy of Holy weeks never imagining that we'd *ever* be doing so confined or be so confined in our homes. The one time of the year when we re-enact the why we still come together as Church for so many years, so many centuries is taken away from us.

Holy Thursday and the instruction on the Eucharist, Good Friday the meaning of suffering and then the finale, the great Easter Vigil and the Mass of the risen Lord on Easter Sunday it will all be different this year. *Different that's all* because we as a risen people can use and *will* use this week as a real opportunity for us to join together as community. Though physically separated we are together. United only as a community rooted in faith can be, in the power of Christ. God bless each one of you and we continue to pray for each other.