

Homily for the fifth Sunday of Lent

Maybe 'self-distancing' or 'lockdown', as necessary as they are, gives you unusual thoughts. I am not sure why I started thinking about Charlie Chaplin's film '*Modern Times*' but I did! Unusual in many ways but certainly because it was released in February 1936 which is 27 years before I was born. It is a comedy and a romance but also a social commentary on the times. A time during the great depression and of increasing industrialisation. Chaplin plays the part of a worker caught up in a what has become known as the system of mass production. He doesn't fit in for one reason or another and a series of sad and comic escapades begin. Eventually he meets a girl during one such escapade and the final scene is both of them walking together during a bright dawn into a future which remains unknown but hopeful.

Having seen the film what must have stuck in my memory was the scene where Chaplin has a breakdown, runs amok and gets stuck in a machine and 'enters the production line' so to speak. One conclusion from the film that could be drawn is that the dignity of the human person was being compromised by some of the methods of production at that time. Both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI in their encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* affirmed the dignity of labour and the need for cooperation amongst the different forces of society and thereby laid the foundations for the social doctrine of the Church. Often referred to as one of the Church's unintended but 'best kept secrets.' Respect for the dignity of human of life extends to all areas and all times. Therefore, I found it disconcerting to read this week some high-profile commentators hinting that it might be better to let social interactions continue to protect the economic prospects of younger people. Even if that were thought to work, which I doubt, would it not be putting people at risk, especially older and more vulnerable people, by act of omission? I.e. in not advising social distancing for all.

In the Gospel Jesus affirms the dignity of Lazarus, even though he has been dead in the tomb for four days by the time Jesus arrives at Bethany. In the tomb Lazarus hears the words of Jesus "Lazarus, here! Come out!" No matter where we are or how we are thinking or feeling we can hear the words of Jesus calling us to come to him. We may be stuck in our houses, feeling anxious, nervous and worried, either well or sick. Perhaps we have had to face worse, maybe a loss of job or business or even hospitalisation of ourselves or a loved one. The voice of Jesus can still resound in our hearts that he is 'the resurrection and the life.' The Christian faith affirms that we are not, like Chaplin's worker, only cogs in a machine. All of us have a dignity and worth because we are made in the image and likeness of God and, we have a relationship with him in which we can hear his voice in the depths of our being.

As Jesus affirms to Martha "I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do believe this?" The same question is posed to us. Like Chaplin and his girlfriend, we can walk together into a new dawn knowing that faith in the risen Jesus is a present and continuing participation in the ever-living Jesus, now at this moment, and in every moment to come. Those who believe in Jesus never truly die. A future a little unknown, but full of hope.

God bless you, Canon David

