

Fourth Sunday of Lent 2020 – some thoughts

When I first started work, I was given some good advice. That was simply, respect your opponents. I have found that it has served me well over the years. This advice came back to me in the light of the current threat to life and health from Covid-19, the so-called Coronavirus. This virus is new, it is infectious, and it is dangerous. So, my inclination is to give it the 'respect' it deserves by following the measures introduced by the Government and the Bishops. Full of tension, I also feel that suspending public acts of worship and practising social distancing go against the grain. But then again, I also know the damage that could be done if we carry-on as if nothing has changed. Everything has, and therefore suspending public acts of worship and social distancing are now part of my way of life and, also yours. I 'respect' the power of this virus and, also the safeguarding measures introduced. As a society we know what we need to do, that is, good hygiene, social distancing, medical treatment and finding a vaccine. But we may also be tempted to ask a deeper question. Why has God allowed so much suffering, as we see across the world, to happen?

There are lots of questions in today's Gospel story of the man born blind. For example, the disciples of Jesus ask him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" His neighbours say to each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Then they ask the man, "Then how do your eyes come to be open?" Later-on the Pharisees become involved. They bring their theology to bear on the question. The problem is that Jesus' actions on the sabbath breaks the law which they thought was set down by God. This pushes them into questioning the man and his parents. They get no answers because in a lovely 'about turn' they are the ones who now cannot see, and the blind man has had his sight restored. What is it they cannot see? It is that Jesus is the Son of God and light of the world. After meeting Jesus, the man can now see and has been given faith. With the light of faith, given to us in baptism, we should be able to see clearly, with our eyes of faith, in any type of darkness. Having said that I can sympathise with the Pharisees in the story who struggle to work out what is happening. I am often in the same spot. It probably didn't help when the man born blind gave the Pharisees a piece of his mind. His parting shot to them is, "If this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing."

The Gospel of John asks us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. He is 'living water', 'light of the world' and 'the way, the truth and the life.' Here, in this story, he is the 'light of the world'. Looking at the life of Jesus, we know that Jesus would soon suffer, die and rise again for this man. Jesus is the one who has suffered our suffering and died our death and he did this because he loved everyone. To our questions the Lord Jesus, it seems, shows us a way by the pattern of his life. It is not always easy to accept that God in Jesus suffered, died and rose again for us and yet God is present to us in this way – the way of life-giving love. We can be present to others in a similar way. The way of life-giving love. Yes, everything has changed because of the virus and there are many questions. But this new virus will not be new forever and we will learn how it is to be defeated. The love that Jesus shows us in his life, death and resurrection is always new and can also change everything and for good – it both senses of that expression. The God of love cannot be defeated, viruses can be.

God bless you

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