

Holy Thursday

I hope the beauty of this time of year has not been lost for you amid the serious troubles of our times. The natural world springs to life after its winter slumber and even the weather starts to get a little better, brighter and warmer. Wherever and whatever our capabilities maybe at this moment, I hope the spring and early summer bring some joy and some hope. The Church reminds us that it is a theological virtue, one of three, the other two being faith and love or charity. I think it's not just the natural world that brings us hope, but also the wonderful examples we have all around us of devotion to duty, professionalism, skill, care and compassion. Certainly, shown in the NHS and care sectors but also by all essential or key workers. But perhaps we can see hope in the way that the nation has answered the call to stay at home to help us, as a nation, to get ahead of the virus so we can manage it more effectively in the weeks and months ahead. This stay at home reminds me of a curiosity in the Gospel story. That is the time Jesus spent at home in Nazareth before the start of his public ministry. The so-called hidden years. I am going to use those hidden years to explore our own *hiddenness* in 'social distancing, and 'lockdown'.

Here is how that period is described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *"During the greater part of his life Jesus shared the condition of the vast majority of human beings: a daily life spent without evident greatness, a life of manual labour. His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God, a life in the community. From this whole period it is revealed to us that Jesus was "obedient" to his parents and that he "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man."*¹ As members of the Church we too are called to 'share the condition of the vast majority of human beings.' For us, unless essential workers, it is to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. But nevertheless, it will be a strange Easter.

This evening in churches across the land the Mass of the Lord's Supper will be celebrated. Although it will not be part of the Mass there will not be a priest who will not think about the washing of the feet, and who will not desire to share with his parishioners the joy of the institution of the priesthood and the Eucharist. Gifts that demand to be shared. But maybe this year they will be shared in a hidden way akin to the hidden years of Jesus' life. We are told from the Gospel of St. Luke that during his hidden life Jesus 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man'. In our 'hiddenness' how can the gifts of this holy night increase within us and our society? There is much 'washing of feet' currently so we have the chance to imbed that service and solidarity for the future. We could invite others to see that this service also expresses the heart of Jesus who is our 'high priest' and gives his life to us in the Eucharist. What is carried out now by many has a supernatural source and goal or end, that is the love of God. We can say it is here, this is what we celebrate and give thanks for.

It is this supernatural dimension that will sustain the goodwill we witness and enhance its goodness, enrich human life and make it last. God's love is hidden now under the service of our key workers, volunteers and in the countless acts of kindness made each day during this crisis. Now is the time for us not only to serve in the way we can but also to discern how

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 531

to reveal to our brothers and sisters the source of the love we see, which is the sacrifice of Christ. There is beauty to be seen in our life of struggle now, but also beauty to be built on - for that civilisation of love that Pope Paul VI inspired us to desire.