

A Short Reflection for Easter - A

Years from now, we will look back on 2020 in disbelief. We will be telling our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, people who haven't been born yet, of the strange things that happened in the world in 2020. And they may find our stories difficult to believe. Really?! Seriously?! Those could be their reactions.

Even for us who are living through this pandemic, it is difficult to comprehend. As Queen Elizabeth implied, in her address to the United Kingdom on Palm Sunday, we are on a wartime footing. But unlike in 1940 when she addressed the children of the U.K. during the Second World War, we are not fighting a war against another country but rather everyone in the world is united in a war against an unseen enemy. And this enemy spreads without recognizing borders or politics or race or gender or economic class. It is transmitted, sight unseen, through human interaction.

To fight this war and to stop this enemy, we have been told to severely limit our interactions; to stay in our homes as much as possible, only go out for essential errands, not gather in groups of more than five people, and keep a minimum of two metres apart when we are in the presence of others.

This is a great sacrifice for all of us but, for us Catholics, it has been particularly difficult as we have journeyed through Holy Week and through the Easter Triduum. Who would have imagined that we would not be able to attend Mass on Sundays. Who would have imagined that we would be absent from the special liturgies of Holy Week? Who would have imagined that we would see Cardinal Collins presiding over Masses with no more than four other priests and with the pews at St. Michael's Cathedral empty?

Lent has always been associated with sacrifice but, in 2020, the sacrifices we have made in the interests of public health and safety have given Lenten sacrifice a new meaning.

But all is not doom and gloom. Some people have treated this time of isolation as a forced retreat. They have taken comfort in prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. They have had the time to reflect on what is truly important in their lives and, most of all, to draw closer to God. This is what we are supposed to be doing every day but, too often, our normal lives are so busy that we have no time to stop and speak with God and, most importantly, hear from God what He wants for us. What is His plan for us?

In the Second Reading from the Mass on Easter Sunday, St. Paul tells us to: 'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.'

We have come through the Easter Triduum to Easter Sunday. At this most important and holiest time of the year, we have confined ourselves to our homes and 'fasted' from Mass because of our concern not only for our own health but the health of our brothers and sisters.

Perhaps the 'blessing' in our forced separation from Jesus in the Holy Eucharist has been the deepening of our faith. Even though we have not been able to have Jesus physically present to us in the Holy Eucharist, we have come to a more profound realization that He is always present to us.

Perhaps our present circumstances have shown us that we may be isolated from each other but not from God. God never abandons us. He is always there waiting for us to return to Him. Perhaps the silver lining in this pandemic cloud has been that, without the physical presence of the Holy Eucharist, we have been forced to rely on our faith in the real presence of Jesus abiding in our hearts.

Queen Elizabeth told us that 'we will see better days'. It was good to have her assurance, but we know that better days are ahead of us because of our faith. We know that God will never abandon us. He will always be with us to sustain and lead us through troubled times; times of sorrow. The things that are on earth may be causing us to lengthen the period of our Lenten sacrifice, but we know, that when the pandemic is behind us, we will be able to return to our Church to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with Easter joy.