

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020
THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE? MOTHERS' DAY TOO!!

Jn 10.1-16, 15, 27 Acts 2.36-41 1Pt 2.10-25

Welcome again, to all, in this time of coronavirus continues, with the hope of some relaxation of the restrictions on the way, but not too quickly, as it's just not as simple as the problems all being solved and coronavirus disappearing into the mist as a bad memory! We need to continue to be cautious and attentive to wise advice.

Now into the not so merry month of May, in this time of crisis, we still find ourselves sort of locked in, uncertain and anxious, although I think we are getting used to the idea of more time at home and to think about life, family, relationships and priorities. It is not at all easy for grandparents, needing to keep at a physical distance, and then there are parents and carers with children at home, trying to focus their attention on continuing learning, as well as more time to play, even if not with friends in the broader scene. It's a good lesson for us all to make use of our time and to reflect more on life, its meaning and purpose. *(And at least I've been able to have my teeth fixed this week, and am able to smile again, and talk without hissing!!)*

Perhaps, most difficult and frustrating and frightening of all is the situation of those who have lost their jobs, their concern about security and the future. At least we see our government at federal and state levels responding to the crisis in practical ways, realizing that there is more to life than economics, and accepting a responsibility for the common good and the good of all, particularly those on the fringes of society. Expansion and growth are not necessarily good things in themselves, but a concern for a fair go for all and a just society, need to be principles applied to decision-making, and here this seems to have been the case, even though the fallout is massive and long-term effects are going to be difficult to deal with.

And now, in today's Gospel, John portrays Jesus, in his farewell discourse, which goes on and on and on, because there is so much to be said about how the future is to be for the apostles in the imminent physical absence of Jesus. It's at an ominous time, but Jesus is clear in his directions, that life must go on, and that his followers must look around and not just up with hands joined helplessly, looking to the sky!

Whilst we might feel we are in a *'veil or valley of tears'* at the moment, or at various times of our lives, that shouldn't be our image for Christian life, as the Gospel is Good News for our here and now, and there is always hope, his ongoing presence assured for those who have faith.

On the practical level today, in Luke's Acts of the Apostles, we jump to life in the early Church, with the realization that the work of the Gospel had to be shared, partly through the appointment of deacons, people of service, in the community, in order to ensure that action follows the

words of Jesus, in how life is to be lived as his followers, particularly in terms of providing for those in need. Once again, it is clear that life in the Christian community is about looking around and responding to others, not just looking skywards, hoping for Jesus to return on the next cloud to welcome his followers into eternity, and to escape from the real world here and now, where he is clearly directing the apostles to engage.

Let's remember that this Last Supper discourse in John's Gospel begins with the washing of the feet, to the objections of Peter, who responds positively when Jesus explains what it is all about. The Bread of Life teaching has already been covered earlier in this Gospel (*John 6*), where the move is from Jesus satisfying natural physical hunger before moving to seeing himself as the Bread of Life (*Bread for the Broken, as we all are*), as spiritual nourishment for the journey of life, which prefigures Eucharist, as we continue to celebrate it now (*albeit virtually at the moment*).

We need to move beyond seeing ourselves as the *elementum passivum* (*passive element*) in the Church, a model which set the tone for the 1917 Code of Canon Law, for the faithful to be obedient to their pastors, effectively to **pay, pray and obey**, without question, although there's not much paying at the moment! Virtual collections just don't have the same ring to them, silent without the plastic notes! Vatican II countered that distorted perspective, with the reminder that the call of every Christian is to pastoral ministry as a responsibility of Baptism. And a part of that is thinking for ourselves, not just blindly following the leader without question.

And now we can surely see that our leaders have let us down so badly, as seen in the failure to address issues of sexual abuse. As a priest, I sometimes feel ashamed and angry at the way in which denial and coverup of such wrongs has only made such hurt and personal trauma worse than the initial offences committed. It has taken far too long for victims to have been heard, acknowledged, and compensated. At least the issues are being addressed now, but far too late.

The emphasis on the importance of orthodoxy over behaviour was a very distorted way of operating, but that's the way it was, until the dark reality of abuse was publicly revealed. One of the problems, as I've said before, was the misguided mentality of protecting the priest, as if almost a sacred species, and keeping up appearances for the good name of the Church, and look where that has got us now! We're paying for that in the longer term. As a priest of 42 years standing, I have always believed one establishes one's own credibility by who one is and what one does. Titles, uniforms and unthinking conformity have little to do with that!

Let's remember that ***WE, you and I are the Church, the People of God***, with a continuing mission to follow Jesus as "The Way, the Truth and the Life", as we hear in today's Gospel. He is talking about the ***Time of the Church, which is our time too***. His message is positive and encouraging, with the reassurance of his presence through the Spirit, his Word as Truth and his call to engagement with life now, and fulness of life with him in the future. Meanwhile,

we all have a part to play, as in stones in a wall or pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, a very contemporary image in the current climate!

Let's not forget either that it's Mothers' Day, to be celebrated in rather different ways this year. Perhaps it gives us an opportunity of being creative in thinking of ways to acknowledge those who are our mothers or mother figures in our lives, even if we can't be physically present to them. Beyond the criticism of this as a commercial secular feast, I have always believed it to be a most appropriate time to think of how grateful we should be for the love they have shared, the many sacrifices they have made for us, and the example they have set in how to be good and loving people, Christ-like role models for us throughout our lives, whether still with us or in our consciousness and memories. Happy Mothers' Day to all mothers and those who are mother figures in our lives.

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10th May 2020
