

A homily / few thoughts for the 4th Sunday of Lent - Laetare Sunday from Fr Allan

Many of us have just experienced a very unusual Saturday night /Sunday morning. We have been prevented from coming together in person to worship God. We haven't been able to come to mass. For many it has been painful, sad and even distressing. It's as if a lifeline has been taken away. Amidst the ever changing events of 21st Century life this one solid rock has been removed. This is not what we had been led to believe. Maybe we equated the physical act of coming together to share our belief, with God's promise that his word would be with us always - that it would last forever. So, naturally we are confused. I think it is important to recognise people's pain - my own pain.

It would be insensitive if I didn't recognise those who have died because of the Coronavirus. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families and friends. We entrust them to the loving care of Almighty God. We also remember those whose lives have been turned upside down and thank all the doctors, nurses, those who work in the NHS, social workers, those who work in the emergency services, the people who try to ensure that the population has the necessities of life and many others who are doing such sterling work in very difficult circumstances.

In the past week I have heard stories of selfishness and heroism, of those who have blinded themselves to the reality of the situation and those who have recognised the seriousness of the times through which we are living. It seems that this blindness, this lack of understanding and this "enlightenment" are two sides of the same coin that is the human condition. This is nothing new. We see this happening at Christmastime when some equate the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ with materialism, exploitation and hedonism, while others see it as a cause for real celebration and an opportunity to enter into a deeper spiritual communication with God.

I think the readings for this, the 4th Sunday of Lent, especially the Gospel of John 9:1-41 remind us that we have a choice to either remain in the dark, blinded, unenlightened or to enter into the light. We can align ourselves to the man born blind or with the group of Pharisees who were unable to see the light that Jesus was offering them.

The Gospel of John contains 7 signs that lead us to Jesus' true identity. The story of the blind man is the 6th sign. (Next we will listen to the 7th sign which is the raising to life of Lazarus). Jesus is the Light. The man gradually comes to know this. Through his healing he sees Jesus first of all as the "man", then a "prophet", then "from God". By the end he believes Jesus to be the "Son of Man" and declares "Lord I believe".

This is the pattern followed by baptised people. They see Jesus as a healer, a miracle worker and Light of the world, the one who saves and the one who frees us from sin. Hopefully Sarah, Neo, Denise, Ana and Gareth who have been preparing for baptism AND ourselves will be challenged also to say "Lord I believe".

In these worrying time it may be difficult to say "Lord I believe". We have to remember that when St John wrote his Gospel he was writing for a Christian community that was struggling. It had just been excommunicated from the synagogue. It was a minority group that was being battered. Amongst many other things the healing of the man born blind was a story of encouragement and affirmation. John wanted to let the community know that just as Jesus Christ had given sight (understanding and enlightenment) to the man he would give it to the

people also. He offers it to us too - even when we overbuy or choose to celebrate in places that should be closed.