

A Homily for the 5th Sunday of Lent from Fr Allan

Normally on the 5th Sunday of Lent in St Dyfrig's and All Hallows' at mass we include the 3rd Scrutiny. On the pathway leading up to the celebration of Baptism at the Easter Vigil there are three occasions when we are invited to scrutinise our lives - to take a good look at ourselves and decide which parts of our lives are FOR God and those which are not. The Scrutinies take place on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent and to accompany this discernment we are also invited to reflect on three readings which have been a part of the Baptismal journey from the very beginning of the Church. The readings are from St John's Gospel and they include the Samaritan woman at the well, the Man born blind and the Raising to Life of Lazarus, which we read today.

(In St John's Gospel there are seven "Signs" that point to the true identity of Jesus Christ. The Man born blind and the Raising of Lazarus are the 6th and 7th Signs. As well as telling us who Jesus is, the Signs are also evidence of the New Creation. This New Creation will take place after the resurrection of Jesus which, perhaps, can be regarded as the 8th Sign).

I think these readings AND the fact that 5 people will be baptised in our parishes, (if not at Easter at some future date) take on a new significance because of the anxious times through which we are now living. The readings tell us that Jesus Christ is the Living Water - the water that will sustain us for all eternity. He is the Light that will enlighten us and enable us to see and understand all that is hidden and mysterious now and, as we hear today he is also the Life - the real life that will bring physical and spiritual life to us even when we feel as if we are as dead as dry bones. Knowing who Jesus is can bring us HOPE. In these months of Coronavirus we definitely need hope.

I have seen and received many messages since we have been asked to self-isolate. These messages have come from Church-goers and non-Church-goers, from believers and non-believers. The surprising thing is that there is something that connects them all. The common denominator is HOPE. They say things like "Life will change but we WIL get through it". "We are in God's hands". "We thank God for all those who work in the NHS". "We pray for those who have died and entrust them to God. We pray for those who grieve and those who are suffering or who are in any kind of hardship". We must have hope.

Last Friday Pope Frances gave a message to the city of Rome and to the whole world. He compared the situation of today, living with Coronavirus, with the time that Jesus and the disciples were in the boat unaware that they were about to be hit by a turbulent storm. He said that Jesus seemed unconcerned by the storm even though the disciples cried out that they were perishing. The Pope wanted us to realise that just as Jesus calmed the storm he will calm the storms of our lives too. He will calm the storm we are living through now.

Hopefully those preparing for Baptism will come to know God as the Living Water, the Light and the Life. They will come know the hope that God gives.

When we read the account of the raising of Lazarus perhaps we think of Lazarus as the centre of our attention. We also have to realise how important Martha and Mary are as well. Their gradual awareness of who Jesus is, is the pattern of how we also come to a relationship with him. In the Gospel their friendship goes up a level. When Jesus arrives at Bethany they simply regard him as a kind of super healer. By the time he reaches their house he becomes the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world. This recognition takes

place before Jesus brings Lazarus to new life. Their initial uncertainty is a natural thing. We are asked to see Jesus in the same way but because of these worrying times we, like Martha and Mary, may be uncertain. This would be natural. We are being asked to have hope before Coronavirus runs its course. But isn't this faith? As St Augustine said "Faith is to believe what you do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believe".

One of the good things emerging from our enforced isolation is to see people being more neighbourly. when Jesus healed he, very often got others to help. May the new forms of being Church, solidarity with others and new ways of being community be strengthened even further because of the hope we have that comes from the Risen Christ!