

## Reflection for 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

We have recently heard on both television and radio the statement, “For travel: essential journeys only.” As travel restrictions continue to tighten throughout Europe and other parts of the world and closer to home, planning holidays and taking other forms of transport seems, for the moment to have been put on hold. The travel sector has suffered significant financial losses throughout the pandemic. Those who work in the travel industry are fearful of their future. Equally, many people have not benefitted from a holiday that would help them to get through the dark days of winter. It has been a tough time for many people as they have felt the effects of the pandemic not just financially, but spiritually and psychologically.

We can also draw similar thoughts to our lives of faith. For the moment, places of worship are closed and for a lot of people that is a struggle. Their sanctuary, their haven or even their sacred space is absent from the lives. They may feel deprived or even neglected. Their physical journey to a church or another place of worship has for the time being been put on hold. Their journey of faith may have come to a significant crossroad and now they may have to decide on which path they need to take at this time. Our “comfort zones of faith” have all been thrown into chaos as we try to find new and creative ways to live our faith at this unforeseen moment in history. It is only natural for us to ask how we interpret the current signs of the times for our lives of faith? The answers are not easy and sometimes they are difficult to find. One simple answer, however, is that we have all discovered who and what is important in our lives. We might have discovered a different way to pray and we may have started to read some books on our faith and its impact on our lives. All is not lost. We should not despair, although it is easy to do so. Difficult as it may be, we can use this time as an opportunity to look at our faith in a different and more creative way. Societies and cultures throughout history have had to adapt to changing circumstances and this time is no different. We have new challenges to face on our journey of faith. Let us not be afraid to face them. Perhaps these words of Thomas Merton will help us redress the balance as we continue to live our faith at this trying time in history.

“The Christian civilisation of the West has incorporated into itself a great deal of the spiritual dynamism of the Christian faith. “New life” has been interpreted as “New activity” and a more fruitful productive existence. Christian culture itself has been increasingly dynamic and activist, and “rebirth” – which remains a central fact of Christian existence – tends to be interpreted in aggressive, activist, rather than passive contemplative terms.

The West has lived for thousands of years under the sign of the Titan, Prometheus, the fire stealer, the man of power who defies heaven in order to get what he himself desires. The West has lived under the sign of will, the love of peace, action and domination. Hence, Western Christianity has often been associated with a spiritual will-to- power and an instinct for organisation and authority. This has taken good forms, in devotion to works of education, healing the sick, building schools, orders and organisation in religion itself. But even the good side towards activism has tended toward an overemphasis on will, on action, on conquest, on “getting things done,” and this in turn has resulted in a sort of religious restlessness, pragmatism and the worship of visible results.

There is another essential aspect of Christianity: the interior, the silent, the contemplative, in which hidden wisdom is more important than practical organisational science, and in which love replaces the will to get visible results. The New Man must not be a one-sided and aggressive activist: he must also have depth, he must be able to be silent, to listen to the secret voice of the Spirit. He must renounce his own will to dominate and let the Spirit act secretly in and through him.”