

Reflection for 4th Sunday of Lent Year B

On Friday, we will be one year on from when we, first, had to close our churches. Few, if any of us, thought that we would be in the same position a year later. However, there was some good news when earlier in the week, we were told that we would be able to open from Palm Sunday albeit with restrictions. For many people, there has been a great sigh of relief. A glimmer of hope and light at the end of the tunnel may now be in sight after a tough and demanding year. As we make our way towards the celebration of the Easter Mystery, the ideas of dying and rising to new life may now become a lot more personal for us as we hope to seek a new life as we make our way out of lockdown. Things will be different. Once again, we find ourselves in a place of uncertainty not really sure of what might be ahead of us. It is difficult to plan and think ahead. At times, a week in the future can almost seem like a lifetime away.

This week, all primary school children return to school. It will be an opportunity for them to meet their friends and get back in touch with school life. It will help them to get back into a routine and face to face learning. However, a few things will no doubt be a bit different, perhaps different words and signs to make sure that everyone is safe. Language and signposts, and new ones at that, are probably going to dominate our lives for the foreseeable future. This year, we continue to celebrate Lent virtually which has been difficult. The celebration of the Easter Triduum and the season of Easter will hopefully be more of a personal encounter. It is through the eyes and ears of faith that we look forward to the Easter Triduum when darkness will give way to light and death is overcome by new life. These words of John Waters, an Irish playwright and columnist, might just help us to keep our faith alive in these challenging days:

“I need a language to hope in. I need words to express my infinite longing that do not make me sound mad, superstitious, reactionary or stupid. It is not that I care what people think of me. I really don't, or at least not as much as I did once. When I was younger (there I go again), I used to care what my peers thought of me, mainly writers, artists, left-wingers – all people who had the best of reasons for taking up certain stances against the way things use to be. There was a time when for me scorn of such people would have been the worst thing imaginable. But now I care less and less, because the questions concerning my place in reality and what my ultimate destination might be are much bigger than any consideration of fashionability or acceptability.

I ask these questions not because I have suddenly capitulated to conservatism in middle age (perhaps I have, but if so, it is an unrelated phenomenon) or because I am terrified of the Last Judgment or preparing for the next life. No, I ask them because I have to, because the need to understand myself to the fullest extent that I can before it is too late exceeds any other consideration, even the friendship of those whose love I still crave. I wish it were otherwise, but that's the way I find myself.

This is as frightening as anything about death. It seems I am destined to step out of the culture, or even worse, to remain in it while seeing through its insubstantiality, but still unable to make out what lies beyond.

I don't believe. I can't. If believing is just gritting my teeth and adhering to some proffered concept of what is and might be, I cannot do it. If a 'faith' is merely a collection of people, a club, in which everybody affirms everyone else, and together they affirm a set of dogmas that have been agreed long before by others, then count me out. Unless my 'faith' accords with the knowledge derived through my own existence, it is not faith at all, but blind acceptance of an ideology. Faith is knowledge.”

John Waters, “Beyond Consolation: or how we became too clever for God....and our own Good,” pages 261/217