

Reflection for 4th Sunday of Easter Year B

It has been a week of sunny weather for most parts of the country. Many people are now looking forward to Monday and a further easing of the restrictions. This means that they will be allowed not just to move around the country with relative ease but will also be able to have a certain limited social life at bars and restaurants. Sadly, at the same time, we have also become aware of how many people are now living in poverty in Scotland. We are very conscious of how many people are unemployed and are struggling to put food on the table to feed their loved ones. We all know the impact of the pandemic on our lives. Poverty has been the most visible tragedy of the pandemic but there are other issues, too, where the impact of pandemic will last for years in the lives of some people. Their lives, in some respects, have been changed forever. The pictures from India are a poignant reminder of how devastating the impact of the virus can be on society. The death toll and the numbers of those who are ill are increasing rapidly. The world can apparently only watch as India struggles to come to terms with the loss of life and the devastation that the virus has caused in people's lives. As we have seen on more than one occasion over the last year, the virus is not restricted by border, age or nationality. Closer to home, we find ourselves thankfully in a stronger and safer position, although that does not mean to say that we can become complacent or lax. We all still need to be cautious and alert for everyone's long term good. As society emerges from lockdown, so too does the Church, both local and universal. We are naturally cautious and perhaps a little afraid of the unknown as to what parish life is going to look like and how it might be understood. The honest answer is we just do not know. It is only natural for us to struggle to make sense of faith in times of uncertainty. This is not something new for the Church. It has been here before. The history books tell us that. However, it has never had to deal with the impact of a pandemic in modern times. A new time, therefore, calls for a new season of faith. If we are courageous and are willing to take a leap of faith, we could see this as an opportunity for a springtime for the local Church even in a time of upheaval and uncertainty. Perhaps, these words of Thomas Halik can keep us going during this season of Easter, when we continue to reflect on the Paschal Mystery.

“This is an era of tremors and upheavals, and there are worse to come. One of the great paradoxes that we will experience, and that we are already experiencing, is that the very part of the Church that all too glibly regards itself as a “stronghold,” will I fear share the fate of the house that was built on sand. Christian faith is a renewed act of belief in meaning, after we have experienced the total debacle of the latter. It is no mere mechanical return to what there was before but requires the courage to trust at the point where we find ourselves beyond the bounds of what we can grasp and comprehend. We usually define the “Christianity” of faith in terms of its “content” and “subject matter” of what is “narrative” in our faith, what is related to the story in which the message of Christianity is conveyed. But let us try for a moment to put all that “into brackets” and come down to the most fundamental intrinsic structure of faith, to that crystal lattice inside the crystal and by “crystal” here I mean both biblical texts and the entire treasury of symbols, dogma, rituals that we encounter in the tradition and the practice of the Church. The paschal character of Christian Faith resides in the experience of two “shocks”. The first of these shocks is “the cross” – the total loss of previous certainties, “leaning out into the night of nonbeing”; such a debacle, however, can give rise to the “solidarity of the shaken”. The second tremor is confronting and overcoming the despair and resignation that one is tempted to fall prey to at moments of debacle, thereby finding an assurance of a different order, which slowly pierces - as a ray of hope- the darkness into which the shaken are plunged.”