

Reflection for 5th Sunday of Lent Year B

We could be forgiven just now for lamenting the passing of a year, when at this time last year we saw the first Sunday of lockdown when our churches were closed and the unthinkable had happened. Today, there is a glimmer of hope with some easing of the restrictions from next weekend. Thankfully, we will at least be able to celebrate Palm Sunday and Holy Week albeit in a slightly different manner. Without sounding too cynical, many of us could not have considered another Holy Week and Easter without some sort of faith connection to our parish communities. A blended approach to Holy Week may be the best outcome for us this year. Such thoughts would have been inconceivable a few years ago, but it is now something that is beginning to shape the post-pandemic Church and our journey out of lockdown. New challenges for a new pastoral reality.

This week, we have seen some bright spring days and a rise in the temperature. Although it is not everything, all primary school children have now returned to school. As the day gets longer, there is a little more of positive thinking that can help us get through these difficult times.

We are now heading towards the final straight of Lent with Palm Sunday and Holy Week on the horizon. Our lives of faith may be a bit tired. We might feel that we lack a certain creativity and energy about our faith. We may crave for something of the past, praying that we can return to it with relative ease. That could simply be wishful thinking. It might not be as easy as we first thought. The call or the way of the disciple has proved to be a challenging road over the last year and some people have suffered as a result. We would only be foolish if we did not recognise that. As we continue on our Lenten pilgrimage, perhaps these words of Timothy Radcliffe will help to keep going, albeit as bruised pilgrim towards Jerusalem and for the celebration of the Easter Mystery. May we keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts as we commemorate and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as we continue in our conversation of faith with God and each other.

The moment that religious people start to talk about truth, the people, become nervous. This is understandable. All over the world violence is associated with different faiths quarrelling about the truth. Christians make claims for Jesus, Muslims for Qur'an, Hindus for Krishna. These claims cannot all be true, and so believers start killing each other. Truth claims are associated with intolerance, arrogance and indoctrination. Even within these religions, interpretations of sacred texts are bitterly contested. As Christians we claim that the Bible is true, but there is a vast proliferation of interpretations of the Bible. Finding the most bizarre has been compared with identifying the most ugly statue of Queen Victoria: the competition is hot.

Even so, we believe that the truth may be sought, patiently and with humility. If not, we shall all just be stuck with our differences. After the Second World War, Albert Camus said in a lecture to the Dominican brethren in Paris, 'Dialogue is only possible between people who remain what they are, and who speak the truth.' There is no point in dialogue if there is no truth. The only basis upon which I may build communion with the believers of other faiths and none is in the shared search for truth. A taxi driver once made some racist remark during a trip through London. I told him that what he was saying was untrue. He replied: 'What do you mean, untrue? They are my opinions.' He assumed that this was an unanswerable defence to his right to assert them.

We can only draw close to people who think differently if we believe that we can reason together and so attain a common truth. Claiming that you have got the truth wrapped up does breed violence and intolerance. Believing that together we may arrive at the truth can heal difference."

Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., "What is the point of being a Christian?", page 116.