

## Reflection for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Year B

As a bright summer morning dawns on Friday morning on what appeared to be a good day, it was sadly balanced by two tragic early morning news stories from different parts of the world. The first of the continued rise in deaths and infections due to Covid-19 in India; the second was of those who were killed at the religious festival in Israel. We are often stuck for words, as we come to terms with these situations, which often leave us feeling lost and empty. There is often an inadequacy in our human language. We fail to express how we honestly feel in these situations as we face up to the reality of their stories. Their memory often stays with us more often than we are prepared to admit. At different times in our lives, we remember these events with a certain poignancy, possibly at Christmas or other family celebrations or events as we recall those who are no longer able to be here to tell their story.

The season of Easter is also about telling a story. It is easy to forget to tell the story that binds us together as a people of faith. The story of the Easter Faith brings us together as people of faith. As fellow pilgrims, we hope to encourage each other on our pathway to God. We need to be able to pull together now, in the light of the pandemic, regardless of whether we are a parish or a diocese. As they say, there is strength in numbers. The pandemic has altered the lens in which we see the horizon of faith. We all know that. For some, it has been difficult but for others it has presented new challenges and opportunities. Their quest for faith, which has unexpectedly opened for them new avenues to explore the gift of faith in their life in the post-pandemic Church. These words, perhaps now quite prophetic, from the late Irish Jesuit and writer Michael Paul Gallagher may help us deepen our roots of faith. It may also be the opportunity for us to open our eyes to new horizons of faith which may equip us for the challenges that we will have to face in the weeks and months ahead.

“Arriving at faith can depend on the outcome of this essential conflict between pride and poverty. Pride here is quite different from vanity. Pride means a closed system with no needs. Vanity, as shown in attention-seeking, is rooted rather in insecurity. Pride can be cultural as well as personal because our world avoids powerlessness in all its forms. Poverty, as used here, is obviously not economic. Like pride it is a radical disposition; it means a self-knowing that admits the humbling truth but without groveling. It is a spiritual attitude which becomes a source of hunger and of thankful trust as in the Magnificat: “The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.” (Luke 1:53)

It is right here- in the battle zone of pride and poverty – that the Jesus of the Gospels fights for our full freedom and remains always dissatisfied with half-freedom. Initially he invites people to healing, acceptance, trust; but sooner or later comes the tougher truth, the challenge to any easy complacencies. There is the Jesus of “Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) There is also the Jesus of ‘unless a what grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain.’ (John 10:24) We want love without dying. We want to find life without losing it. We would prefer happiness minus the Beatitudes, good news minus grit. Most of all we want the illusion of not being down-and-out, and so we miss the truth that sets us free – that we can meet God most in our down-and-out-ness.

To see only a serene and peace-giving Jesus is to miss the conflict in the gospel story; it is to suppress the strand that culminates in his murder. But conflict was there from the outset, even in the Annunciation. Thousands of paintings have portrayed that scene as bathed in golden light; they seldom capture what is so strongly expressed in the text, that at first Mary was ‘deeply disturbed’ by the angel’s message, and that it was a long road of anxious questioning before her surrender of ‘let what you have said be done to me.’ (Luke 1:38)”

Michael Paul Gallagher, s.j., “**Free to believe: Ten steps to faith,**” pages 119/120.