

MASS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC - SERMON

The year is 587BC around the months of July and August, Catastrophe has hit Jerusalem. The Babylonians have destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. The religious rituals so important to the People of Israel have been taken away from them. Only a handful of people remain, mainly the poor and the weak. Most have been deported from their homeland.

For Israel, this is a total disaster, a crisis of the political life, social life and religious life of the people. Nothing is the same anymore, everything has changed especially religious ritual which is no more.

The Book of Lamentations which we have today for our first reading is an attempt by the People of Israel to try and make sense of what has happened to them. An attempt to make sense of recent history through the eyes of faith.

It seems that Israel has two options. Either;

- 1 Abandon the Lord the God of Israel and follow the local's gods of the places to where they have been deported.
- 2 Or...Remain faithful to the God of Israel and seek God's presence during the chaos and suffering.

The faithful People of Israel chose the latter. They remain faithful to the Lord God of Israel. They must look carefully at their lives and adjust to a new way of living their religious life until the day that brighter days will come and once again, they can fulfil their religious duties.

The People of Israel place their hope in God, and with a defiant shout of faith, as we hear, they cry out;

*'The favours of the Lord and not all past,
His kindnesses are not all exhausted.
Great is his faithfulness...
So I will hope in him.'*

Despite all the chaos and suffering them, they have faith, they trust that God will save them...better days will come...and they were right!

The year is 2020AD it is April time, early spring - a disaster has hit the whole world. People are dying of a silent, invisible virus and there is currently no vaccine. Thousands have died all over the world, over a million have been infected. Thousands have lost their jobs, everything has closed. People are afraid to go outside, people are isolated, alone. The churches all over the world have closed, and the sacraments have been taken away from the people.

Again, just as in 587BC everything has changed, nothing is the same anymore, even our religious rituals have gone. How are we to make sense of this? Where is God in all this suffering and chaos?

As Christians, we instinctively look straight towards our Lord Jesus, His life, His teaching and His Cross and Resurrection. Like the People of Israel over 2500 years ago, we focus upon what God has done for us, and so we look to Jesus. Jesus gave His life for us - He will not abandon us now. As He made very clear, we are God's children and God loves us. During this Coronavirus Pandemic, let us cry out our faith in the goodness of God.

Look at today's Gospel - let us take Jesus as our example. During the storm, Jesus was sound asleep. Whilst all around Him is chaos, Jesus experiences absolute peace, His head asleep on a cushion. In this image, Jesus exemplifies his perfect trust in God His Father. With God, Jesus knows He has nothing to be afraid of.

As soon as the disciples cry out to Jesus, He wakes and with awesome power, Jesus calms the wind and still the sea and restores peace.

Jesus then asks them - why are you afraid, where is your faith? He is saying to them and He is saying to us today, in the storms of our own lives, whatever they may be - do not be afraid, only have faith, I am with you.

Do not be afraid is actually the most repeated commandment in the whole of our Sacred Scriptures.

Our faith in Jesus will cast away our fears. Despite what is going on around us, let us as faithful Christians, take Jesus as our example and trust Him as our Saviour. He gave His life for us, He will not abandon us now. As the Book of Lamentations reminds us,

‘the favours of the Lord are not all in the past
His kindnesses are not all exhausted,
Great is His faithfulness...so I will hope in him.’

...and we too will be proved right, let us only have faith.