

DAY TWENTYTWO – CHANGE OF PACE

SETTING: if you have kept newspaper items following the course of Covid-19, spread them over your prayer space. They will teach you many things.

Prayer:

Slow me down, Lord.
Stop me in my tracks.
Shield me from the rush that
Sweeps me off my feet and
Sends me, blind to what really matters,
Spinning through time far too fast.
Slow me down.

It might seem that this prayer has been answered. Covid-19 has brought the world to a standstill. Staying at home, going outdoors as little as possible, perhaps working offsite, has forced a change of habit, a change of pace. The rush hour traffic has ceased. The parent taxi service getting children to and from their many sports is not required. With many businesses shut, even the fast-paced tv commercials have taken a break. Much has changed.

What will happen post-pandemic? Will we simply go back to the way things were? Can we? Do we want to? In this prayer time, think about the changes touching your personal life and any benefits coming from them. How might these benefits help shape your time when the present crisis is over?

SCRIPTURE – MARK 6:30-32

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.

Stay with this passage for some minutes. Think about your own lifestyle prior to the lockdown – probably as busy and involved as the apostles. Can you hear Jesus inviting you to use this time of isolation as a gift – inviting you to rethink your busyness, your concerns, to re-programme your priorities?

SCRIPTURE – LUKE 10:38-42

..... Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered: 'Martha, Martha,' he said 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.'

Use this second scripture as a further meditation. Spend some more minutes in quiet stillness. Place yourself in the scene.

- Who are you - Martha, Mary, Lazarus, one of the disciples, an onlooker?
- What do you take in from the conversation that speaks to you of your own situation?
- Jesus emphasises the importance of listening to the word of God? How might you use this time of isolation to better appreciate God's word?
- What do you "worry and fret" about that is secondary to what should really concern you?
- "Burying" oneself in work can be a screen or a blind blocking out obligations or responsibilities, or an excuse for not facing issues. The lockdown offers a chance to examine if this applies to you.

Jesuit priest, John Reilly, comments on this episode: *Jesus vindicates Mary by showing how she does what he most wants from all his disciples. She listens to his word. This does not exclude Martha's listening also, in her own way. In the busyness and distractions of her serving, if she is a normal woman, she misses nothing of importance said by Jesus!* [*Praying Luke*, John Reilly, St Pauls Publication, 1994, p139]

You who need no time to live
Who live beyond all time
Took flesh and lived as one of us
Dwelling in *our* time
You know the fuss we make of time
How we never have enough
Time's taste enslaves the best of us
You came in time to free us
Showing love held out in service
Sees time melt away
Love lays claim to everything
All time night and day

“PRAYERS OF LIFE” by Michel Quoist is a collection of prayers relating to everyday life. Published in 1963, it linked everyday experiences to faith and turned “praying” into a real conversation with God. One of these prayers has great relevance to this day’s reflection and is reprinted here:

Lord, I have time

I went out, Lord,
People were coming and going
Walking and running
Everything was rushing, cars, lorries, the street, to whole town
People were rushing not to waste time
They were rushing after time
To catch up with time
To gain time.

Goodbye sir, excuse me, I haven’t time
I’ll come back, I can’t wait, I haven’t time
I must end this letter, I haven’t time
I’d love to help you, but I haven’t time
I can’t accept, having no time.
I can’t think, I can’t read, I’m swamped I haven’t time
I’d like to pray, but I haven’t time.....

You who are beyond time, Lord, you smile to see us fighting it.
And you know what you are doing.
You make no mistakes in your distribution of time to us.
You give each one time to do what you want us to do.

But we must not lose time, waste time, kill time,
For time is a gift that you give us,
But a perishable gift, a gift that does not keep.

Lord, I have time, I have plenty of time,
All the time that you give me....
Years, days, hours, they are all mine
Mine to fill quietly, calmly
But to fill completely, up to the brim
To offer them to you, that out of their insipid water
You may make a rich wine such as you made once in Cana...

I am not asking you, Lord, for time to do this and then that,
But your grace to do conscientiously, in the time that you give me,
What you want me to do.

DAY TWENTYTHREE – BE KIND

SETTING: photos of parents, grandparents and/or others who have shown you the meaning of kindness.

Opening Reflection:

Jesus, you encouraged your friends to call God “Abba”, an affectionate name for a kind and loving parent. This is the God who *makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.* Help me imitate this kindness towards all, not only in this time of anxiety and concern for our health, but in all the days ahead, in all my thinking in all I speak in all I do.

Chapters five and six of Matthew’s gospel narrative provide much of Jesus’ teaching relating to kindness. The Beatitudes highlight the desire of God for respect for the various conditions and situations of humanity, bless the poor in spirit, the gentle, those who mourn, who yearn for justice, etc; to be salt and light – giving flavour and brightness to life, to make peace, to forgive – to love your enemy, to pray, not to worry or overstress... All these are ingredients for or products of kindness. Use these chapters as background to prayer today.

Kindness is the language
which the deaf can hear
and the blind can see
[Mark Twain]

Kindness, the dictionary states, is the quality of being friendly, generous and considerate. From the beginning of this Covid-19 crisis, the call to BE KIND has been constant and penetrating. BE KIND echoes through the world from politicians, health professional and other authorities, suggesting this attitude holds a key to overcoming the pandemic. It might well do so.

This prayer time invites meditation and reflection on the beauty and power of KINDNESS and the act of BEING KIND. As the above quote from Mark Twain tells us, kindness has no boundaries but is skilled at removing them, no difficulty communicating and, like smiles and laughter can change darkness to light, sadness to joy, despair to hope.

SCRIPTURE – LUKE 1:67-79 – THE BENEDICTUS

The birth of John the Baptist prompts his father, Zechariah, to praise God, acknowledging this birth as a prelude to the coming of God's "Promised One", the Messiah, and to give thanks for God's *loving kindness* (often translated as *tender mercy*). This Canticle of Praise is prayed daily in the Morning Prayer of the Church. There is rich treasure here for meditation on KINDNESS:

*Blessed be the Lord...
who has visited his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up for us a mighty saviour
in the house of David his servant,
As he promised by the lips of those
who were his prophets from of old.
A saviour who would free us from our foes,
from the hands of all who hate us.
So his love for our ancestors is fulfilled
and the holy covenant remembered.
He swore to our ancestor Abraham, that
free from fear and saved from the hands of our foes,
we might serve him in holiness and justice
all the days of our life in his presence.
As for you, little child,
you shall be called a prophet of God the Most High.
You shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way before him,
To make known to his people their salvation
through forgiveness of all their sins,
the loving kindness of the heart of our God
who visits us like the dawn from on high.
He will give light to those in darkness,
those who dwell in the shadow of death,
and guide us into the way of peace.*

Read the passage at least twice, listening for the word or phrase that catches your "mind's ear". Return to that word/phrase. Let it sit with you as you ponder the theme, BE KIND. Contemplate the *loving kindness* or *tender mercy* of God in your life, your family's life, in the world. Pray the Canticle for those lost in the *darkness* or *shadow* of Covid-19. Pray for kindness to endure.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven.

Your kindness, as your mercy, is everlasting

Your kingdom come.

Your reign is one of joy and gladness

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Your will is that we love one another and thus be a sign of your presence.

Give us today our daily bread.

Nourished by your love, we will be kind, gentle, compassionate.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Your forgiveness kindles our kindness, strengthens our weakness.

Save us from the time of trial.

Shelter us, shield us

Deliver us from evil.

Guide us into the way of peace.

For the kingdom, power and glory are yours now and forever.

Love does not come to an end.

There is a WORLD KINDNESS DAY on 13 November each year when spontaneous acts of kindness are encouraged. What's to stop you, me, us from making it a daily celebration?

[Make kindness the new normal]

DAY TWENTYFOUR – GRATEFULNESS

SETTING: a symbol of thanksgiving

Prayer:

Thank you!
Two little words, often left unspoken
but important and necessary
even in difficult times like right now.
O God, so rich in compassion and mercy,
and greatly in love with your creation,
to thank you should be easy and spontaneous.
But with the world turned upside down,
populations in lockdown and
businesses in shutdown,
what's to be thankful for?
Open my eyes to see your hand at work
even while uncertainty fills us with worry.
Reveal a little more the mystery of your love.
Lead me to the gifts at present wrapped in darkness.
Help me to say what I so much want to say:
Thank you!

SCRIPTURE – JOHN 21 – Post Resurrection

The disciples are dispirited following the death of Jesus. They know they have let him down; they are grieving his loss, and they themselves feel very lost. Peter decides to go back to what he knows best – fishing. Some of the others join him.

Covid-19 has stripped us of our certainties – our routine, the things that help give us identity and purpose. Now we're not so sure. In this critical time when we have had to let go of many personal freedoms, we cannot plan ahead and we feel quite insecure.

The appearance of Jesus on this occasion is not sudden; he is at some distance and can't be clearly seen for who he is. Even when the disciples think the person is Jesus, they have to get to the shore to really see him. Peter leaves the boat, as he did once before [Mt 14:28], and makes his way to Jesus through the water – surely a symbol of baptism here, our entry into the very

life of Jesus. Bringing the huge catch of fish to shore – a symbol of the people Peter (and all disciples) bring to recognise Jesus through their witness and the power of the Word – and they instinctively know Jesus is with them.

Jesus prepares breakfast for the disciples – their togetherness a celebration of thanksgiving (Eucharist) - and then, through Peter, they find voice to affirm their love for Jesus and one another (“Feed my sheep!”).

Make this reading (John 21) your meditation and consider its relationship to thanksgiving, gratefulness.

Other readings you may find helpful as you discern thanksgiving in the context of today’s theme:

Luke 2:8-19 – the angels, the shepherd and Mary

Luke 5:12-16 – A leper – and the self-isolation of Jesus!

Luke 7:11-17 – The widow of Nain

Luke 17:11-19 – Ten Lepers

1 Corinthians 1:4-9; Philippians 1:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Benedictine Brother, David Steindl-Rast, is renowned for his commitment to inter-faith dialogue and his constant message and if we want to be happy we must be grateful. A Google search of his name will introduce you to several interviews on the subject and to the website: gratefulness.com

You will find a wealth of material for prayer and meditation and reading.

The root of joy is gratefulness... It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratefulness that makes us joyful – Br. David Steindl-Rast

- Gratitude and praise are closely related:

Psalm 34: I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exult his name forever.

- Look for other similar passage, including Mary’s Magnificat [Luke 1:46-55]

GIVING THANKS

The word, *Eucharist*, is derived from the Greek, meaning *to give thanks, to be grateful*. The central act of Christian worship, The Eucharist, is primarily an act of thanksgiving. In the Eucharist we **gather** to give **thanks** (remembering God's love for us in Jesus and then, nourished by the Word of God and the gift of Jesus, we are **sent out** to show our gratefulness through loving service – *to proclaim the gospel by our way of life*).

PETITIONS

- Give thanks and praise, for the gifts in your own life.
- Give thanks and praise for those who serve the community in times of crisis and emergency
- Give thanks and praise for teachers and all who enable and encourage the development of gifts in others
- Pray for those whose experience of life makes thanksgiving difficult.
- Pray for the ungrateful, the wasteful, those who abuse or destroy the gifts of others
- Pray for those who are never thanked.

Conclude with this meditative poem, **TRINITY**. It relates to gratefulness through our human yearning to know the One that is unknowable yet is at all times with us –

*How to speak of God – the Being of all beings, the Love of all that is loveable,
the Light shining in the darkness, the Love that is eternal and glorious.*

*Who dares to set words to paper in dealing with Mystery!
What audacity of a dewdrop to write the Ocean's biography.*

*But let us hallow God's name, be it Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier,
or Water, Flame or Wind, or Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

*Let not our voices be silent – let not our faith be dormant.
Our doxology, however off tune, might awaken all creation to sing
alleluia.*

DAY TWENTYFIVE – ENCOUNTERS

SETTING: a lit candle and flowers and/or coloured cloths/ribbons

Prayer:

To encounter your Word, O God,
the Word made flesh in Jesus,
is to encounter a living voice
a loving voice
calling, inviting, challenging,
revealing, offering faith,
instilling hope,
expecting only love.

In this quiet time, tune me to your Word
that I may encounter Jesus, risen and glorious
to hear his voice and to gift myself
for your glory,
for the good of those dear to me
and for all the world.

Today's prayer time is itself an invitation to come alongside the people who "encounter" Jesus as recorded in John's gospel narrative. Each of John's 21 chapters is an episode in which a particular encounter involving Jesus becomes a life-changing experience – one way or another. Here is a sketch of each chapter. Spend time with one or two of them and prepare for your own encounter.

THE CHAPTERS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL:

1. **John the Baptist**, Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel.
John's humility in acknowledging Jesus and his generosity in letting his disciples follow Jesus – and their inquisitiveness...
2. **Mary**, mother of Jesus; Servants at the wedding.
Cana – an encounter with friendship, trust and joy. Trust builds confidence and creates confidence in others.

3. **Nicodemus** - an honest enquirer with a lot to lose.
What risks was he taking in his encounter? His commitment was still some way off (Ch.19:39). What have I lost, what might I still lose, in following Jesus? What commitment have I made? Time now to renew?
4. **Samaritan woman** – a foreigner and unpopular among her own. *This encounter heralded a huge change, a transformation. Jesus was brutally honest with her. She met the challenge with courage and found faith.*
5. **Cripple at Bethzatha pool** – a person friendless and just clinging to hope. With only a little help he could have made it to the pool (healing). *Is my time of isolation helping me grasp the value of togetherness?*
6. **The large crowd fed** – the encounter of Philip with Jesus’ question about where to buy food, leads to further encounters, to decisions, the revelation of Jesus as the “living bread”, division and commitment.
7. **“The Jews”**, the people, the Temple Police – unbelief, uncertainty, division... Encountering Jesus affects people individually and personally.
8. **The adulterous woman**; Scribes and Pharisees – an encounter with injustice, mercy, compassion and the revelation of Jesus as “I AM”.
9. **The man born blind**: an encounter with Jesus, bring the person newly healed to an encounter with authority; the encounter creates a witness.
10. **Pharisees** – shepherd theme; “The Jews” – stones – Goodness encounters suspicion; love encounters rejection and the desire to kill.
11. **Lazarus, Mary, Martha** – three very different encounters with faith at the centre, leading to a further revelation, *I am the resurrection and the life (vs25)*, and a consequence – *Jesus no longer went about openly (54)*
12. **Palm Sunday crowd**; hardened attitudes; sense of foreboding – Some believe, some don’t; many confused. The inability to take the step that Nicodemus, and others, had taken (vs47). *Where do I stand in this mixture? How obvious do I make my commitment to Jesus?*

13. **Judas, Peter** – pivotal characters. Both confident. Both flawed. Both chosen. Jesus washes them and loves them and they both betray him. *Consider the situation they were in. What would I have done?*
14. **Philip, Judas** – placed as bridges in Jesus' discourse, bring the assurance that we are not orphans and that, in Jesus, the deep, inner and lasting peace we all seek, can be found – and is, in fact, given. *Do I really know and believe these truths?*
15. **Vine – Branches:** a unique, intimate encounter. *Remain in me – I give you a new commandment to help you - for you do not belong to the world. (vs 4, 12, 19). How conscious am I of remaining in Jesus?*
16. **Promise of the Spirit** – an encounter that will change everything; an all-conquering encounter that will show how joy follows sorrow.
17. **Jesus' "priestly prayer"** – encountering eternal life in and through Jesus. *Our love for one another ensures unity, which is the heart of the "only true God", a Trinity of Persons. (vs 23)*
18. **Guards, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate** – several encounters, conflicting, challenging. The words of Jesus, *Who are you looking for?* are addressed to everyone. Do I have an answer?
19. **Pilate;** "two others" crucified; soldiers; Mary and others at foot of the cross and "the disciple he loved". Everyone encounters Jesus differently, as he encounters us in the various circumstances of our lives. *What part have my circumstances played in bring me to Jesus?*
20. **Mary Magdalen; the disciples; Thomas** – encounters that are reunions.
21. **Peter** – and encounter that is healing.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul
And all that is within me, bless God's holy name
Bless the Lord, O my soul
And do not forget all God's benefits.*

[Psalm 103]

DAY TWENTYSIX – LANGUAGE

SETTING:

Prayer:

You speak to us in so many ways, Lord,
telling your love and calling our names
in rainfall and birdsong, in laughter and tears,
in good and bad times,
in sickness and in health
you let us know you are with us.
It can be hard to recognise your voice
amidst the rushing and the noise.
But now, I hear you in this gift of quiet
with routine broken and separation bringing
us closer than before. Yes, your voice is here
telling your love and calling our names.
Help us to listen, and to learn.

Language is usually associated with spoken words. Voice and sound are vital ingredients. But language is also present in sight and touch and smell and taste. All our human senses relate to language. Each is a channel of communication, tying us to one another, even unconsciously, linking us to and helping us celebrate life. It's body language.

In this time of lockdown, when, as a nation and internationally, we have been separated from one another as never before, we have a chance to reflect on the power and importance of "language" in all its forms. Social media, despite its wizardry, can never replace human contact in meeting our need to be physically close to others. Only then can all our senses do their work of nourishing, supporting, healing and developing and celebrating community.

SCRIPTURE – MARK 5:1-20 and 21-43 [NRSV]

This chapter in Mark is rich with language. The man living "among the tombs" had lost all sense, was excluded from his community, denied all human contact. He instinctively recognises Jesus but can only communicate from his crazed state... Healed and restored, he wants to follow Jesus but is told to "Go home to your friends". The "friends" have not wanted Jesus to stay but the new disciple changes their opinion to amazement.

The language of touch features in the second half of this chapter:

- Jesus is asked to “Come and lay your hands” on a sick child.
- A woman knows she will be healed “If I but touch his clothes”.
- Jesus takes the dead child “by the hand...”.

The languages of fear, trembling, weeping and laughing also play a part in this section of chapter five.

REFLECTION

1. Spend time with this chapter. Identify the various “languages” at play here and the power they exercise in the lives of those involved. How they convey distrust, disgust, despair, sadness, mockery, amazement...
2. Listen to the voice of Jesus in this chapter. What do you hear in the way he speaks in the different scenes?
3. What is the effect of your “language” in your own lived situations? Even in isolation you are still “speaking”. To what effect? In what tone?

INTERCESSIONS

Pray for people disabled in any way, especially for those unable to communicate, to explain themselves, how they feel, what they need, who they are, what they value, fear, miss...

- For those without the power of speech or who feel their voice is powerless – may love and caring hearts speak for them.
- For those who cannot see, deprived of sight from birth or accident; or blinded by prejudice or anger – may they be guided with patience and respect.
- For those whose sense of touch or smell or taste is somehow disabled – may they not be misunderstood or misjudged but know kindness and reassurance.

Believe in “the instinctive compassion to heal”

[Queen Elizabeth II – address during Covid-19]

THE LANGUAGE OF TOUCH

Every part of us touches something sometime
and speaks connection with the voice of feel.

Touch opens the path to friendship
and guides through troubled ways.

Eyes touch the heart with their knowing look;
they bring light to unspoken corners
and hope to brokenness.

Feet feel the softness of sand,
the sharpness of stones;
the warmth of summer
and security comes with a timely foothold.

Touch seals a contract, forgives a hurt.

It finds the solid ground
for travelling through a lifetime.

Touch tells a partner *I'm still here.*

It holds to life, closing the space
of separation and uncertainty
and speaks the words no words

can ever fully say -

I love you.

When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose you can make me clean." Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." [Luke 5:12-13]

DAY TWENTYSEVEN - WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

SETTING: a statue or image of Mary, mother of Jesus.

Prayer:

Together-ness has a new meaning these days.
We are together in this lockdown time,
in this time shared by people everywhere,
but we are separated, apart, and
cannot even stand close to one another.
This separateness fights a cruel and lethal virus.
O God, may we not lose sight
of what together-ness really means.
Help us cling to unity once restored
for we need each other
to give life health and meaning.

“We’re in this together” has been a clarion call through the nation during the Covid-19 alert, urging the population to act as one – to stand together against a common enemy. But this “together-ness” has meant separation. Social distancing, living a “bubble life”, has emphasised isolation and for many has brought loneliness and sadness. Not being able to be at the bedside of a relative dying of the disease, a most difficult consequence.

This prayer time is an opportunity to look more closely at this strange time of isolation and think about what it teaches about the connection between personal space and being together. The Scripture passage pre-figures the gift of Pentecost – the birth of the Church – and is offered as a base for your meditation.

The arrest and crucifixion of Jesus struck terror in the hearts of the disciples and they fled. Separated from the one they had followed and admired, they “self-isolated”, not daring to believe there could be a reunion. News of the resurrection of Jesus was dismissed as nonsense and they were admonished for being so “slow to believe” [Luke 24:25]. They came to realise that their separation helped them to appreciate each other more and, in Jesus, they found their centre, their purpose and their reason for being.

The Acts of the Apostles opens the identification of the first “community”, leading to the Pentecost experience – the emergence into the light of Christ Jesus, risen and glorious, the beginning of a new “Way”, the end of “lockdown”!

SCRIPTURE – ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 1:12-14 [NRSV]

When they entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Reflect on

- this “community of believers”,
- the centrality of prayer,
- the sharing of gifts

Here is the Church in miniature; togetherness is a key component; the Holy Spirit is poured out on each person; there is equality and a variety of gifts.

Mary the mother of Jesus is seen as “Mother of the Church”. Her crucial role can be imagined, played out in this setting:

COMING TOGETHER

The gathering that meant facing one another, knowing they had let Jesus down. Mary greets each one, a mother welcoming her returning children.

PRAYING TOGETHER

Recognising their need of God and the strength only God could give. Mary gathers them – a hen gathering her chickens – giving thanks, praying for each one; letting the silence speak their sorrow and their hope.

HEALING TOGETHER

The generosity of love overcoming resentment and disappointment. Mary talks of her own initial doubts (*How can this come about?* and *Why have you done this to us?*) and encourages them to accept forgiveness.

REMEMBERING TOGETHER

Their time with Jesus; his companionship; their travels; his words and actions. Mary shares her memories and with the disciples brings to life their time with Jesus.

WAITING TOGETHER

The time before any birth is a time of anxiety; a time of wondering and hoping; an expectation of something marvellous about to be. Mary speaks of her time with Elizabeth and the journey with Joseph to Bethlehem.

REJOICING TOGETHER

The joy of new life overcomes the pain of giving birth. Mary remembers the “overshadowing of the Holy Spirit” and the “transfiguration” that changed her forever. The Holy Spirit breathes new life in this gathering, and the Church, the People of God, is born.

Concluding prayer:

LITANY OF OUR LADY

Mary of Bethlehem –	Pray for all mothers
Mary of Nazareth -	Pray for all families
Mary of Cana -	Pray for all marriages
Mary of the Cross -	Pray for all grieving
Mary of the Cenacle -	Pray for all waiting
Mary, model of womanhood -	Pray for all women
Woman of faith -	Hold us in your heart
Woman with hope -	Hold us in your heart
Woman in love -	Hold us in your heart
Woman anxious -	Hold us in your heart
Woman so humble -	Hold us in your heart
Woman compassionate -	Hold us in your heart
Woman who wonders -	Speak for us to God
Woman who listens -	Speak for us to God
Woman who understands -	Speak for us to God
Woman who gives -	Speak for us to God
Mother of humankind -	Befriend us, unite us
Mother of the Church -	Keep us close to Jesus
Mother of Mercy -	Help us to be forgiving
Mother of God -	We thank God for you

DAY TWENTYEIGHT – RECREATION

SETTING: colours, pictures, lights depicting hope.

Prayer:

The empty tomb laughs in the face of death
and calls for love to embrace the world.
You, O God, have set the pattern
for our future – to love as Jesus loves
with a joyful heart, kind and caring.
Help me, and all of us, to move out from
our “tombs” with new found energy and love
for one another, leaving lockdown,
becoming locked in to
love
kindness
joy

The empty tomb is death’s open wound. A gaping hole exposes the power of love unable to be contained, even by death. This is the spark that opened graves, dispelled fear, brought people out of hiding and transformed them into proud, unyielding witnesses. The empty tomb spells the resurrection of Jesus and signals the undying hope of Christians.

The empty tomb can be a symbol, and a motivating force, for those emerging from this time of lockdown. Isolated and hidden from the tentacles of Covid-19, whole populations world-wide have stayed home as a prime defence against the killer virus. And, in the process, we have learned much about ourselves, about our need for company, of living in community.

As we prepare to leave our “tombs”, are we ready to put into practice the lessons of this solitude? How will our “new life” be distinguished from our “former selves”?

SCRIPTURE – JOHN 20:19-21 [NRSV]

The disciples were in lockdown! Behind locked doors, “for fear of the Jews”, they were still unable to accept the reality of the resurrection. Jesus appeared among them, reassuring them. But Thomas *wasn’t in the bubble* at that time, and a week later, *although the doors were shut*, Jesus comes again...

It seems the disciples were in self-isolation for at least two weeks!

Stay with this reading; let it speak to you –

- of your own time in lockdown – how has it tested you?
- of your understanding of the resurrection – how hesitant or reluctant is your belief?
- of the barriers you still place between yourself and Jesus
- of the barriers still in place between yourself and others

Let your heart talk with Jesus about how you want to live your life following this lockdown experience – and how you might begin the change before restrictions are lifted. Let *the disciples* into your bubble. Listen and learn.

*On this planet, over the last three thousand years, different religious traditions developed. All these traditions carry the same message: the message of love. So the purpose of these different traditions is to promote and strengthen the value of love, compassion. So different medicine, but same aim: to cure our pain, our illness.even scientists now say basic human nature is compassionate. [Dalai Lama, *The Book of Joy*, p.251]*

We all carry “seeds of compassion”. Has lockdown, this time of separation from our usual lifestyle and relationships, placed us in a garden nursery or greenhouse environment, nurturing these seeds? Imagine the result!

When you say, ‘I I I I’ you are going to come a cropper. But when you say, ‘How can I help?’ even in the midst of your deep anguish, it’s got an alchemy that transforms your pain. It may not take it away. But it becomes in a way bearable, more than it was at the time when you were just saying ‘poor me’, thinking only about yourself. [ibid. p.255]

*We’re wired to be other-regarding. We shrivel if there’s no other. It’s really a glorious thing. When you say, ‘I will care for only me,’ in an extraordinary way that **me** shrivels and gets smaller and smaller. And you find satisfaction and joy increasingly elusive. [Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy*, p.257]*

**Recall Queen Elizabeth II’s words:
Believe in “the instinctive compassion to heal.”**

What are some of your “hopes” for yourself, your neighbourhood, your parish and for our world, rising from your experience of lockdown, that might contribute positively to post-virus re-creation?

PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING – For:

- those working to provide “essential services”
- front line medical staff and all caregivers
- parents coping with limited space and other resources
- the gift of life

PRAYERS OF PETITION – For:

- those grieving the loss of loved ones
- victims of violence
- those afraid or alone
- the sick, mentally and physically

Concluding prayer:

O God, so rich in mercy and compassion...

**Send forth your spirit
And renew the face of the earth**
[see Psalm 104]

LITANY OF TRANSFORMATION

Jesus:

You took what was small and made it enough

Response: We praise the wonder of our God

You took what was ordinary and made it extraordinary. [R]

You took what the world holds in contempt and made it a treasure. [R]

You took what was wounded and made it whole. [R]

You took wind and storm and made the calm. [R]

You took a child by the hand and gave her life. [R]

You took people afraid and gave them courage. [R]

You took time to listen and gave space to hear. [R]

You took sin and weakness and gave pardon and peace. [R]

You took bread and wine and gave yourself. [R]

You took death and showed it how to live. [R]