

The 5th Sunday of Easter

Dear Friends,
Dearly Beloved in Christ Jesus,
Welcome most warmly to our worship on this the 5th Sunday of Easter.

Let us be still to remember Our Lord's loving and living Presence with us as we meet to worship Him.

And this we do,



in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Grace mercy and peace
from God the Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.
Amen

*When we cry out to the Lord in our trouble,
he will deliver us from our distress.*

Let us in silence call to mind and confess our sins

And the assurance of God's forgiveness for all those who truly repent

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Epistle

1 Peter 2,1-10

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house ^a to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Hear the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. according to St John.

Gospel

John 14 vv1-14

Jesus said, Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you **do** know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Address

Today is the 5th Sunday of *Easter*. Yet in a world in Lockdown, struggling against such an horrific global pandemic, with such terrifying suffering and loss of life, I am sure, physically, emotionally, spiritually, we feel ourselves very much in the season of Passiontide.

Let us attempt to enter into Our Lord's feelings as He utters the words in today's Gospel. On that Good Friday Eve, at His Last Supper, He is saying *Good-bye* to his closest friends and companions. He, alone, is fully aware of the agony that awaits him the following day. He knows, after bitter scourging, He will be nailed to a wooden Cross, and die, not only in physical, but in spiritual agony as well, alone, forsaken, not just by them, but by God. Yet in His love for the Father, for us and for the whole world, He continues along the painful way, *The Way of the Cross*, and bids us to follow Him. Thereby, through His suffering and death, He becomes for us the Way to the Father, and the Way to Eternal Life

Such unimaginable suffering, such saying *Goodbye* alone, has, and will become the experience of so many souls in the world today. So tragically, over 30,000, some claim over 50,000, of our fellow countrymen and women have already trodden that lonely *Via Dolorosa*. Let us in our thoughts and prayers today attempt to enter into the suffering of our world, and particularly the agony of those who are struggling to breathe, and those unable to breathe without the aid of a ventilator. We remind ourselves, that in crucifixion, death comes by asphyxiation. So often when people die, we concentrate on the pain of those who are left. Let us try to share the pain of the dying person: as he or she, alone, must say *Good-bye*. Let us remember as well those 250 million men, women and children who, it is predicted, will face starvation in the wake of the virus.

Good Heavens! I can hear people saying. *This all sounds far too depressing. I don't want to go there.* And, cocooned in a privileged self-isolation, we don't have to. *We can* switch off. We can look for placebos. Make a joke. Play some music. Watch TV. Go for a walk. Think of something *nice* instead. Shut it all out. Get back to normal. *Wash our hands*, literally *and* metaphorically, and *pretend, hope*, everything will be alright: for us, and for them.

No doubt, those same people will argue: *Alleluia? Alleluia.? Those words ring rather hollow: with all that danger and death around us.*

Faith-experience tells us that if we turn our back on suffering, *real* prayer, Communion, oneness with God, becomes very difficult. We find God very distant, remote, absent: self-isolating.

I would invite you to pray, not just the words, but to pray *to* Christ Crucified. As we pray to *Christ Crucified* in *His* pain, in *our* pain and in the pain of others, *we* find *Him*, and *He* finds *us*. We discover His *Presence* with us. We find light in the darkness, a balm for pain. And we no longer wish to escape that suffering, but to share it: and, where we are able, to work to relieve it. If for most of us that means just remaining in self-isolation, let us remember with such depth of gratitude those who risk, and those have given their lives, in ministering to the sick and dying.

It is only united in prayer with Christ Crucified, oned with Him in His suffering love, and in the pain and suffering of ourselves and others, that we shall all come, in the fullness of time, to share with Him, the height and depth of Easter Joy. For self-giving Love does not exclude suffering, pain and death, but rather embraces it, in all its fullness: and rises victorious. **Alleluia. Amen**

A Collect for today

Crucified Christ, Risen Christ,
your wounds proclaim
the depth of your suffering love
and the great Victory of your risen life:
give us such compassion and love
that we may share the sufferings of those around us, and work and
pray to bring healing to their affliction.
This we ask in your Name.
Amen

Let us Pray

Christ Crucified, in stillness we contemplate and give thanks for your suffering and death on the Cross: the measure of your and the Father's infinite love us and for each and every member of your creation.

Crucified Christ, we thank you for your Body broken, your Blood shed. Through suffering and death You have become the Way through which we know the Father, and receive forgiveness, peace, and the gift of Eternal Life.

Christ Crucified in stillness we come to you in the suffering and pain of your world. Especially we remember those who suffer from the Coronavirus. Be to them a light in their darkness, a balm in their pain, a loving Presence in their isolation.

Crucified Christ, we thank you for all those who work at such risk to themselves to bring healing for the sick, and comfort for the dying. Bless those who have given their lives in the service of others.

Bless all those who work to provide a vaccine and a cure. Give wisdom to scientists and politicians as they seek to contain the disease.

We give thanks for all those who work to provide our food and other essential needs.

Christ crucified in the stillness of your Presence we bring before you our needs and the needs of others.

Be with all those who mourn the loss of a loved one, with those who suffer extremes of loneliness, problems of mental health, financial hardship, starvation, hunger, and lack of medical provision.

Crucified and Risen Christ we remember all those who have died. In your self-giving love grant them your gift of Eternal Life.

Christ Crucified
Draw us to Yourself
That we may find in You
A sure ground for faith
A firm support for hope
And the assurance of sins forgiven

and

The Blessing ✝ of God Almighty
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon us,
and upon all those for whom we pray
This day and evermore
Amen

If you have not done so already, I invite you to read the Address I wrote for Passion Sunday, which you can find below. It is I feel even more relevant to us and to the world now, than when I wrote it. If you did read it, I urge you to read it again. It comes with my love and prayers. I trust and pray you may draw comfort and strength from it.

Please read and use often as well, the Passiontide Devotions and Prayers you will find as well.

Passion Sunday

Romans 8.6-11

John 11.1-45

Collect

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Passion Sunday Address

Perhaps at this moment, more than at any other time, each person on this planet is, confronted with the reality of his or her own mortality. Ironically, those who feel most secure are those who have contracted and recovered from the Coronavirus, and for the moment have gained, like Lazarus in today's Gospel reading, at least transitory respite. The thought of dying is usually something we have the luxury of postponing, or pushing into the back of our minds. It's not something we normally want to think or talk about: but, in our present troubled world, it is sheer escapism and denialism, not to acknowledge its reality, for ourselves, and for those we hold most dear.

The reality and imminence of death intensify the beauty and reality of life. Ordinary things: each moment, sunshine, children's laughter, fresh leaves on a tree, a piece of music, a simple cup of tea, flowers opening in the garden, and most importantly friends, neighbours, family and loved ones, in the face of death, intensify in beauty, meaning and value. We become more deeply thankful for *those* things and *these* people, and for the very gift of life itself: and all that we have so often, so much and for so long taken for granted. Faced with the reality of our mortality, our faith, and the loving Presence of God become a much deeper and important reality as well. The ordinariness, the water of life, are transformed into the richness of wine.

Today is Passion Sunday. In this season of Passiontide, as its name implies, we, the Church, enter more fully into the sufferings of Our Lord. Passiontide culminates in Good Friday, the Crucifixion of Our Lord, and his agony, forsakenness and death on the Cross.

Unlike most of us though, death was not something that our Lord sought to escape and avoid. Rather, the momentum of his life towards Jerusalem, His words and actions at the Last Supper, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, reveal it was something, at such personal cost and pain, that He deliberately and purposefully *chose*. His total offering of Himself was a perfect response of His love for God, and His death, a perfect demonstration of His, God's, infinite love, for each one of us: for you, and for me.

Such overflowing love, such willingness to suffer and die, were revealed to Lady Julian of Norwich in her life of contemplation and prayer at a time when three quarters of her townsfolk had lost their lives in the Black Death, and she herself had narrowly escaped death.

*Our Blessed, Courteous Lord travailed into that full time
That he would suffer the sharpest throes
And the most grievous pains,
That ever were,
Or ever shall be
And died at the last.*

*And when he had so done and so borne us to bliss,
Yet might not all this be enough to his marvellous love?
Then showed He me
In these high overpassing words of love,
'If I might suffer more
I would suffer more'.*

In moments of life and death, we actually discover and experience such self-giving love, even in ourselves, however much we may have dimmed the image of God in us. How willingly would we, if only it were possible, take upon ourselves the life-threatening illness of a child or grandchild. And let us at this time give thanks and praise, and pray for Doctors, Nurses, and all those who risk *their* lives in the front line combating the Coronavirus, as well as all those who are providing essential services. Let us remember all those who have already given their lives in the service of others: and those who have had their lives taken from them.

In Our Lord's agony and death on the Cross we see revealed the ultimate underlying reality of existence, the infinite love of God: a love which has given us life itself, a love which through suffering and death has redeemed us, and a love which through our Lord's Resurrection is stronger than death, and bestows upon us the gift of eternal life within God's abiding Presence.

May we this Passiontide, in our silence, prayers and devotions, so enter into and share the sufferings of our Lord, of ourselves and others, that we come to know more fully the infinite depth of God's love for each one of us, and each and every member of his creation. May we, thereby, with Blessed Paul know in the depth of our being that there is nothing in life, nor in death, that can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord: nor ultimately separate us from one another. **Amen**

Lenten and Passiontide Devotions and Prayers

Stillness and Silent Prayer

**Be still
And know that
I am
God**

Very early in the morning,
while it was still dark,
You got up,
left the house
and went off to a solitary place,
where You prayed.

When you pray,
go into your inner room,
close your door
and pray to your Father who is in secret,
and your Father
who sees what is done in secret
will reward you.

Penitence

**Crucified Christ,
In sorrow, sin,
Come I to Thee.**

**In mercy, love,
Come Thou to me.**

*Psalms 51,130.
Luke 15*

The Jesus Prayer: repeated often

**Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of God,
have mercy upon me a sinner**

Desire and Longing for God

As the deer yearns for cooling streams
so my soul is thirsting for you my God.

O God, Thou has made us for Thyself,
and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.

Until I am substantially oned to Thee
I may never have full rest, nor true bliss.

God give me Thyself,
for only in Thee do I have all.

And Our Lord showed these words and said,
'I am the ground of your seeking.
It is my will that you have it.
How should it then be
That you should not have your seeking?'

**Sharing and Giving Thanks
for the Sufferings of Christ**

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ

**When they came to the place called the Skull,
there they crucified You,
along with the criminals
one on your right,
the other on your left.
You said,
*Father, forgive them,
for they do not know what they are doing.***

**From noon until three in the afternoon
darkness came over all the land.
About three in the afternoon
You cried out in a loud voice,
Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?
which means
*My God, my God,
why have You forsaken me?***

Psalm 22vv1-21.

**Thanks be to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits Thou hast won for me.
For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.
Most merciful Redeemer,
friend and brother,
may I know Thee more clearly,
love Thee more dearly,
and follow the more nearly,
day by day**

**We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee,
because by Thy holy Cross
Thou hast redeemed the world.**

**Good Lord Jesus,
All my thanks to Thee.
Good Lord Jesus,
Blessed may Thou be,
Because Thou suffered for me;**

**It is a joy, a bliss and endless delight to Thee
That ever didst Thou suffer thy Passion for me:
And could'st Thou, ever, suffer more,
Ever, would'st Thou suffer more.**

**Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my life, my soul, my all.**

**You were pierced for our transgressions,
Tortured for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon You,
and by your wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on You
the iniquity of us all.**

**This is my Body which is given for you.
This is my Blood which is shed for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.**

**O Sacred Banquet,
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the soul is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given**

(St Thomas Aquinas)

Difficulty in Prayer

So He says this,
'Pray inwardly,
Even though you feel no joy in it.
For it does good,
Though you feel nothing,
See nothing,
Even though you think you cannot pray.
For when you are dry and empty,
Sick and weak,
Your prayers please me,
Though there be little enough to please you.
All believing prayer is precious in my sight.'

Lady Julian of Norwich.

Hymn *Lord, teach us how to pray aright.*

He loves us and enjoys us,
And so he wills that we love Him and enjoy him,
And firmly trust Him.
And all shall be well.

Praying for others

Let us learn to pray the News

As we watch the news,
or in silent prayer reflect upon it
let us repeat often one of the following Jesus Prayers

**Lord Jesus Christ
Son of God
Have mercy**

OR

**Crucified Christ
Son of God
Have mercy**

Post Communion

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.