

Homily for The Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time  
(Year A)(08/11/20)  
First Sunday of Second coronavirus lockdown

The psalm that we read at Mass today is believed to have been written by David as he is out in the wilderness, hiding from Saul. He is cut off from the comforts of life, confused by the blind jealousy of the man to whom he has only ever showed love and loyalty, and perhaps worst of all he is cut off from his experience of God in the sanctuary. He remembers with misty eyes what it was like to be able to revel in the presence of God as in his memory he gazes on God in the sanctuary, seeing his strength and his glory, feeling his love and singing his praise with 'lips of glad song'. But all this is, for him, just a distant memory at this time. David misses the simple joy of resting in God's presence, and it is not just a sadness that he feels, but it is a physical pain, an ache in his body: 'my throat thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you'.

It is not difficult to see how this experience of David might come to life for us. We read words such as those of this psalm so often that they can trip quite lightly off the tongue and become familiar, but today we can really inhabit those words, can really say them as if they were our own. Or hopefully we can.

It does seem as if we are in the wilderness with David, cut off from the old familiar life. It is quite hard to see where the good news is in all this, but however short good news may be, there are always opportunities. We need to give some time to reflecting on how to spot the opportunities to let God in, at times when life seems tough.

What are the opportunities in this present time? Well, I think the psalm today does help us. David groans of his physical longing for the Lord. Is that what we are feeling? It is in some ways easy for me, because I can still say Mass, I can still receive Holy Communion, which I know that you cannot. I am so aware of that. But it is a real loss, a real bereavement for priests not to be able to feed their people. In Graham Greene's 'The Power and the Glory' the whisky priest, who is so riddled with contradictions and failures, hangs on to the justification for his continued efforts by saying that whatever other people might be able to do, he can put God in people's mouths. It hurts us very deeply to be deprived of that, but I know it hurts you more to be without it. I would like to encourage you to pray to feel this hunger, not to lose it. The hunger to receive Jesus is both a pain and a blessing (as is my inability to feed you) because it keeps alive in us a dissatisfaction with the way things are. So, I suggest that you pray for a hunger such as the psalmist felt. If we are not hungering for Jesus, what are we hungry for? In the light of eternity, how will this period of time look? Might it become the time when Christians discovered once again a physical hunger for the Lord which we can only satisfy when we stand before him at the altar? Might such a rediscovery transform the Church?

The second suggestion that I would like to make to you about opportunities to be found in this unhappy time is a rediscovery of prayer. It is lovely to go to Mass,

but there is a danger that we arrive and let it all happen around us, it just starts and keeps going to the end, regardless of what we are doing. But in this strange time we do not have that, so we are driven to pray on our own, and that requires us to engage with what to do, and how to do it. Perhaps another opportunity of lockdown is to treat it as a school of prayer.

Each weekday at six in the evening the parish will gather on the internet for prayer (our bishops have asked us all to pray together daily at 6pm, but we were there before them!). I would like to suggest that you join this, and if you can't get onto the internet then join us on your own at home – say the angelus and a decade of the rosary for us and let's wrap our parish in prayer.

Each day (apart from Monday) one or more of our churches are open for private prayer. We cannot have Mass in public, but almost every day on one of our altars the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for us to adore, for us to pray in front of. Each week we have some three and a half hours of adoration – we have never had that before! Our bishops have asked us to make our churches available, and to use them. If you have not previously prayed before the Lord on the altar for adoration, this may be a chance to try. Of course we can pray at home, or in the park, or using the internet, but the only place we can put ourselves in the real presence of God is in our churches. Even if we are there for just a few moments, we can be like St John at the Last Supper, resting his head on the breast of the Lord. My goodness do we need some experience like that now.

So this is a painful time, but it is also a time of opportunity. Let us use it well, and make it a chance to do more, not less. If we do that we will come out of the experience stronger and more ready to face whatever lies ahead.