



4th Sunday of Lent (Year A)

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 22 March 2020
Pro-Cathedral of St John the Evangelist**

At a time when the whole world seems to be falling into a darkness of fear and uncertainty as the Corona Virus spreads among us, we read in this Sunday's Liturgy that Jesus is the bringer of light. *"As long as I am in the world",* says Jesus, *"I am the light of the world"*. It is good for us to hear these words from Jesus today and take them to heart. They are not words spoken only to the blind man, or to the disciples who were with Jesus that day: they are words spoken directly to each one of us. They are words of hope and they are an invitation to deepen our faith, our trusting faith, in the Lord. He is with us in our darkest moments and if we let him take us by the hand he will lead us, in his way and in his time, into the light. He will do this for us as individuals, and he will do this for us as families, as communities, and as a society - if we let him.

Sometimes it seems to me that we are busy trying to build a society which does the opposite: which pushes God to the sidelines or out of the picture altogether. This is not something new: it has been happening for a long time. Faced with so many challenges, including now the health crisis which is sweeping the world, we seem as a society to be incapable of grounding ourselves in what is so obvious to people of faith: that God exists, that God is at the heart of all that is, and that only in God will we find a way forward. Even we, as people of faith, can unconsciously fall into this trap, giving lip-service to our beliefs by attending Mass occasionally, or even regularly, but not really allowing the depths of our faith, and the richness of our tradition, to guide us in our daily lives. We look to the opinion polls to determine what is right and wrong; we look to celebrities to provide us with models to follow; we look to our financial resources to guarantee our security; we look to the experts to save us from what threatens us. And then, out of the blue, we are confronted by a virus which is spreading throughout the world, and we realise that opinion polls and public opinion won't save us; media celebrities won't provide us with the answers; money won't protect us from a pandemic; and self-proclaimed experts and social commentators won't guide us through the crisis we are presently facing. Rather, it is only through faith in God, who is made known to us in Jesus, that we can make any sense of what is happening and find our way to a deep serenity which will sustain us in the weeks and months ahead. Only in God, who is made known to us in Jesus, will we discover what it means to encounter, and respond to, challenges and difficulties in a truly human, a truly Godly, way.



God, of course, works in the world and through the things of the world. It is why, when God wished to finally reveal himself to us, he came among us as one of us: Jesus, fully human and fully divine, makes God known to us in a way we can understand. We do not look to God, then, to intervene so much from outside the world. Rather we look to God to reveal himself, and to act on our behalf, from within the daily realities of our lives. God is at work in those who are trying so hard to develop a vaccine for the Corona Virus. God is making himself known in the nurses and doctors who are putting their own well-being at risk by caring for those who are sick. God is speaking through our leaders who are reminding us, forcefully, that we are all responsible for each other and must be prepared to surrender some of our freedom and independence in order to protect others. God is encountered in those who, in an effort to ensure that they have enough of the necessities of life, do not selfishly prevent others from having the same opportunities. And in this moment of crisis God is inviting us to allow him to make himself known to others, and to be present to others, in us and through us. Now, more than ever, we are being asked to remember that we belong to each other, we are responsible for each other, and we depend on each other.

It is Jesus who is the light of the world and the light of our lives. It is Jesus who is, in the words of this morning's psalm, our Good Shepherd who is busy about leading us to safe pastures. Even though, precisely because we must care for each other and protect each other, we are not able to come together to celebrate Mass and receive the Lord in the Eucharist, we know that we are not deprived of his care, of his love, of his consoling and healing and strengthening presence. We can invite him into our lives and into our hearts at any and every moment of the day. Do we believe even for a minute that he would not answer that prayer? Circumstances mean that we are, for the moment, deprived of Jesus as the Bread of Life. As long as this lasts may we all, instead, invite him into our hearts as the Light of the world. And as we do, may a deep hunger for the Bread of Life grow within us so that, when we do once again hear the priest or minister, as the Sacred Host is held before us, say "the Body of Christ", we will recognise the true presence of the Lord and welcome him as the one who comes to strengthen us for all that lies ahead.

Christ, be our light; shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light; shine in your Church, gathered today.