

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2024

I am more than aware as I look around that some of you have been coming to the Triduum here at the Abbey for many, many years, perhaps bringing your children, who are now bringing their children!

All of us have celebrated these most sacred days innumerable times. So, what I wonder will be different this year? What might you be looking for from these days together? More importantly, how might Jesus want you to leave this place different? That He wants you to leave different, I have no doubt because that is a gift and promise that He places before you. So, where do you need to be open to this promise and gift?

On Palm Sunday I reminded those who were present that this great week and especially these great days take us on a journey to the very heart of our faith. A journey that answers the deepest questions of our human existence. The liturgy we celebrate, the scriptures we listen to make present the power and possibility of encountering God's healing love through the active and living presence of Jesus himself. It presents to us the love affair that God began '*before the foundation of the world*'. Here we are then, face to face with God's outrageous love.

Of course, this drama of God's love is brought into sharp focus at every Mass. Love is made flesh on every altar and we receive this enfleshed redeeming, medicinal love into our lives through Holy Communion. An amazing truth that we can all too easily take for granted. Each of the readings that we have already been anointed with this evening brings to our attention the simple desire of God, to bring us out of slavery, to free us with a remedy that heals and empowers, so that we in turn can share the incredible encounter we have had. We can be the presence of Jesus to others a living tabernacle because He is alive in us!

Our Triduum this year, as Fr Chad will have explained, has the theme: *Christ is alive*. Our life is alive with Christ. This extraordinary truth is

nowhere truer than in His eucharistic presence. Christ is alive and his one great desire, is that we too are fully alive with His presence. So, as we begin this Triduum let me ask the difficult question: If Christ is alive and if he has made His home within us then: *Why do we appear to be walking dead?* Is it because we find ourselves caught in a habit of behaviour that seems to defeat us? Do we find the gap, between what we claim to believe and how we choose to act, getting larger?

Has deceit, laziness, pride, violence, gambling, drink, pornography, promiscuity, gossiping, unforgiveness— have these just become the normal way of life that has now entrapped us. Has our marriage, our work or other relationships become a daily minefield to be negotiated? Do we find ourselves on a journey of survival? Do we feel empty, going through the motions? Perhaps having more doubts than convictions. Is life simply something that happens, something to endure rather than be enjoyed? Are you caught in the grip of shame, fearing that others will discover just what a fraud you are?

If any of that is true then welcome, rest assured you have come to the right place, and you have come to the right person - Jesus. Years ago, while working in a centre for those addicted to alcohol and drugs, I was sitting with someone who had just had the most spectacular meltdown in fact they had just destroyed something that I had been working on for a long time. They looked at me, as I was internally trying hard to hold it together and not remove their head from their shoulders, they said: *“Do you know what I like about this place.”* Not trusting myself to speak, I merely grunted! They went on, *“The thing I love most about this place is that you simply have to be in a mess to stay here.”*

Over the years I have come to understand that this is why St Benedict called the monastery an infirmary. Jesus hasn't called the perfect, the ones who have got it all worked out and their life all in order. Rather as Fr Matthew Kilty who was a monk of Gethsemane Abbey once said. *“I've been novice master, oblate master, guest master and retreat master and I'm now*

over ninety. In all these years I have come to see that whether its novices, monks or guests, most people come to the monastery broken, battered, with some dysfunction and lots of questions. But we all come looking for healing. We're a mess, but that's not a problem for God, loves a mess!" God loves a mess because He loves to save, to restore, to heal. In fact, He loves to save, restore, and heal much more than we desire to be healed, restored, and saved.

You have come to the right place because you have come to the one who has the medicine for whatever ails you. Christ is alive and if He is alive and if in this sacrament of love He gives Himself, then know this, believe this, and live this - You can be healed. There is no way that God wants you to remain sick, whether that is a physical illness or an emotional or spiritual wound, God wants you healed. The history of our faith reveals that this is possible. Unfortunately, many people interpret the scriptures according to their own personal experience and opinions, instead of pressing into the experience that the scriptures themselves reveal. We settle for less when God wants to give us more.

I have been re-reading recently an extraordinary testimony of faith a book by Fr Walter Cizek SJ who was imprisoned for over 22 years in Russia. The book is called *'He Leadeth Me'*. There is a deeply inspiring chapter on the meaning of the Mass in which he graphically describes the danger and difficulty of celebrating Mass in the labour camp of Siberia he writes: *'When we were constantly hungry in the camps, when the food we got each day was barely enough to keep us going, I have seen priests pass up breakfast and work at hard labour on an empty stomach until noon in order to keep the Eucharistic fast.'*

He speaks powerfully about how the bread of life was a real source of sustenance, the effect of which you could feel in daily life. Above all it was the example of the lay men in the camp who were hungry for the Eucharist, even when it could result in persecution and recrimination. He writes:

'These men, with simple and direct in faith, grasped the truth, and they believed it. They could not explain it as a theologian might, but they accepted it and lived by it and were willing to make great sacrifices, in order to receive this bread of life...No danger, no retaliation could prevent me from saying Mass once I understood what it meant to them. Life in the labour camp was Calvary for these men in many ways every day; there was nothing I would not do to offer the sacrifice of Calvary again and again for them.'

I find this powerful and challenging. If you and I come to this eucharistic encounter expecting to meet the living Jesus. If we come with total trust and openness, then here is the truth. You will be healed. How can I be so confident? Because I believe in HIM, I believe that God desires to heal us. *'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief'* is not only the prayer of Jairus, but of each and everyone of us. *'Speak the word only and I will be healed'* is the most direct prayer given to us by a pagan Centurion soldier. I believe. In fact, let me really step out in faith and say, I believe that Christ has already been walking, working among us – I believe that some of you have already been touched by Him.

I know that Christ is alive, and I believe what Pope Benedict taught in the Post Synodal Exhortation *'Sacramentum Caritatis'* – the Sacrament of Love – he wrote:

'In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27) and becomes our companion along the way. In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. Jn 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth...In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular the truth about the love which is the very essence of God.'

Christ is alive and HE is present now. Can you feel His presence...ask him: *'Lord what is the truth you want me to understand? What area of my life that you want to bring your healing truth to? Lord speak the word only and I shall be healed?'*