

COMFORT

in

North Carrick

Caring Observant Mindful Friendly Obliging Responsible Tactful

Providing comfort to the people of North Carrick at a time of crisis

Sunday 19th April 2020

We have had some considerable time now of various countries imposing lockdowns to try to reduce infection rates. We have just completed three weeks and it looks like the social distancing instruction will be extended.

Much of what we see and hear is related to bad news and continued isolation and yet there are positives, the return of community spirit, people making efforts to bring some laughter and positive thinking, the commitment of our essential workers, all are causes of celebration.

There are other positives coming from these strange times, pollution decreasing markedly, nature recovering from the damage of years within a few short weeks.

But what of ourselves?

Up until this time, most of us have lived lives full of activity from the moment we wake until the moment we sleep: work, social activity, shopping, fitness regimes, sport etc. Now this has all been taken away, how do we fill the void? How do we cure the boredom?

In his book, *Anam Cara, Spiritual Wisdom From the Celtic World*, John O'Donohue, tells the story of a man exploring Africa. The man was on a journey through the jungle and desperate to reach his goal. He had a number of Africans with him, to act as bearers, and they raced through the jungle for three days stopping only to eat and sleep.

After three days, when the explorer began to urge them on, they refused to move, he kept urging them, because he was desperate to reach his destination, but no matter what he said they refused to move. Finally one of the Africans told him why they refused to go on: he said "we have moved too quickly to get here, now we need to wait to give our spirits a chance to catch up with us".

Just as nature is using this time to recover perhaps we too should recognise this as an opportunity away from the normal demands society makes on our lives to allow our spirits to catch up.

We have an opportunity to stop and appreciate the creation that surrounds us, to appreciate relationships we may have taken for granted.

We have an opportunity to get to know ourselves again, to reclaim what it means to be a person of faith.

We have an opportunity to be changed and to change the world around us: we have an opportunity to be a true people of the resurrection.

The temptation will be to wish this time away so we can get back to 'normal' which would be a waste of an opportunity to take advantage of, and share in, God's redeeming and transforming power.

As we continue to celebrate the resurrection so may the Holy Spirit guide us through this time of fear into the light of a newly resurrected world where we have grown closer to God through a time of spiritual renewal.

Fr. Jim

St. Oswald's



A message from Lynne Rankin, Session Clerk of Maybole Parish Church

This Sunday if I had been in church and helping lead worship, I would have looked to the CoS website and scripture for inspiration. I did this and these prayers by Andrew Kimmitt, Probationer Minister at Kinnoull Parish Church, stood out for me.

Glorious God of all, You are the giver of new life, You are the one to whom we owe each breath, You are the reason for our hope.

Send your enlivening spirit, be present with us as we come close to You, seeking Your light to see what has been revealed, seeking Your warmth to set hearts aglow with Your love seeking Your truth, that we might trust.

As we proclaim the Easter gospel, that in You is life, which conquers death, make us anew Your beloved children.

Merciful God, We confess that too often we have lived lives of those not worthy to be called Your children.

Though You are light, we have preferred to lurk in shadow, though You are truth, we have made idols of lies and falsehood, though You are love, we have been hard of heart.

Too often You show us the Way, and we have wandered far off course. We turn to You with repentant hearts and seek Your forgiveness.

We lay claim to your promise, and pray that You will transform us, re-make us, that we will live as Your children, and by word, thought and deed, we might lead lives worthy of subjects within Your kingdom of love, peace and mercy. Amen

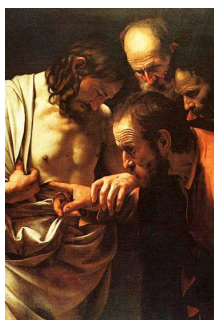
As Easter passes under lockdown, I hope and pray that our great and wonderful God will fill your lives with hope and love, strength and courage and renew your spirits to serve Him and His people, however we can.



EASTER DAY—from Rev Gerald Jones

There are times in life when we have 'second thoughts' about one thing or another. Knowing when to pay attention to these is an important lesson to learn in life.

Our 'second thoughts' may include a reservation about a previous action, position, decision or judgment, or a change of mind about a deeply-held belief or conviction in the light of new evidence or personal reflection.



This was certainly the case with Thomas, disciple of Jesus. St. John's Gospel tells us that Thomas was not with the Twelve, when they came together in a room on the evening of that first Easter Day. For Thomas, the whole story of Jesus having been raised from the dead was too much to accept without critical enquiry and direct personal experience.

Eight days later, however, Thomas was with the Twelve when they met once more in that room. There and then, Jesus invited him to come forward and touch his wounded hands and side. During that week, Thomas had 'second thoughts' - doubting his doubts - and on seeing Jesus, his heart overflowed in love and devotion, exclaiming: 'My Lord and my God!'

Having 'second thoughts' can be regarded as a weakness, rather than a virtue. Rethinking a previously, and passionately held conviction, can cause offence, and invite ungracious comment. The English poet, William Shenstone, said with derision that 'second thoughts oftentimes are the very worst of all thoughts.'

Thomas shows us today how 'second thoughts' can be recognised as a blessing.

Through his own mental revision, he cast off doubts about the Resurrection, and came in person to acknowledge Jesus Christ as 'My Lord and my God!' There is no shame in having 'second thoughts.' J.M. Barrie, the Scottish novelist and playwright, who penned Peter Pan, said: 'I have often found that the man whose second thoughts are good is worth watching!'

Thomas proves the point: his 'second thoughts' were good, and make him worth watching. They transformed a sceptic into a servant of Christ, and he remains a tribute to the power of 'second thoughts' to this day.

Hugh Montefiore, a former Bishop of Birmingham, got it right when he wrote: 'There is nothing wrong in second thoughts: they may well be better than first thoughts. The search for truth is all important, and fresh insights, even if they may involve abandoning earlier positions, ought always to be welcomed'. Indeed, as an old saying goes:

'Blessed are those who have second thoughts; they shall not be disappointed.'

From Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chair of Our Lady and St Cuthbert's Parish Pastoral Council

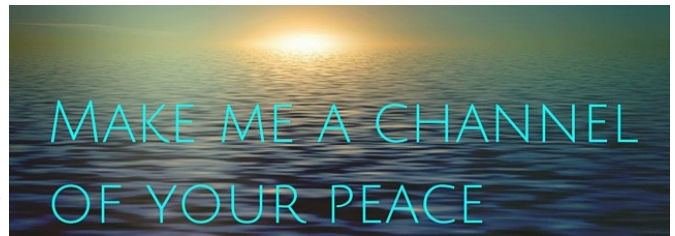
Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated every year on the Octave of Easter. The message of The Divine Mercy is simple. It is that God loves us – all of us. And, He wants us to recognize that His forgiveness is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon Him with trust, receive His compassion, and let it flow through us to others.

These are difficult times. Many are enduring physical separation and isolation from loved ones and some are experiencing extreme loneliness. It is so important that we reach out with our compassion to neighbours and offer companionship, comfort and friendship. We can be sharing the latest lockdown meme, making a phone call, smiling and waving in a window, offering to pick up some essentials when doing our own shopping.

Others are confined for long periods with our families which can bring its own tensions and anxieties. A few years ago Pope Francis gently reminded us that the perfect family doesn't exist. What a relief! But the simple rules he suggested can go a long way to keeping everyone on friendly terms. "A healthy family life requires frequent use of three phrases: Please, Thank you, and I'm sorry, and never, never, never end the day without making peace."

Christ died for us so that we, in turn, might forgive and be reconciled with one another. In this way, as individuals and as families, we can know the truth of Saint Paul's words that, when all else passes away, "love never ends."

In your quiet place of prayer remember St Francis of Assisi's prayer: Make me a channel of Your peace; where there's despair in life, let me bring hope; and where there is sadness, joy.



In this first week of Easter, how do we ensure that the joy of resurrection remains with us in our 24/7 living, especially in these trying times? As we listen to the news of the daily statistics of death from the virus, we realise that the finality of death, with all its consequent sorrows, is still very much a fact of life. As Christians, we have the reassurance in the resurrection of Jesus that physical death leads on to further and more abundant life. Sadly, for many this is not so.

How then do we manifest this joy we claim to have? Perhaps this is an unprecedented opportunity for us, with the help of God's grace, to display the hope, love and joy of the resurrection in the circumstances of our daily lives. Walk the

We have to "walk the walk" not just "talk the talk".
Paul Kivel

walk, not talk the talk! Above and beyond what is humanly possible,

God can work in us, through us and even as us!

Someone once said that really living the Christian life 24/7 is as hard as walking on water. Maybe these days it's even harder? Believing that God's grace is sufficient for us to overcome anything, living, even in self-isolation, with the joy and hope of Easter is the challenge we face today. Together, as God's people in North Carrick, we can be part of the great community spirit being shown by all. Seen or unseen, known or not, God is definitely at work in our community in this pandemic, and even in our nation and wider world. It's up to us how we are seen, as people living the faith we profess. This season of Easter we have the chance to reflect to a still fearful and anxious community the joy that conquers fear. God is with us, waiting to make use of our hands and feet.

The story goes that in a terrible drought, a pastor called his people to a service to pray for rain and only one little girl turned up with an umbrella! Let's get out the umbrellas!

Ellen Hawkes

Fr Ambrose, of Ampleforth Abbey, recently noted that we are all presented with a situation in which the values and beliefs that we talk so much about can be acted upon. There are vulnerable people that we affect beyond our local communities and parishes. In our day-to-day actions and decisions, it may be difficult to put the interests of a wider community at the forefront of our minds. In these numerous cross-roads that we face each day we are at risk of succumbing to the monotony of living responsibly during the pandemic. The Queen offered possibly the best advice in just her fifth address to the nation in her 68-year reign. She spoke of her hope that in years to come, "everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge."

Will I be proud of this when the dust settles?

Whilst this is a much more philosophical approach than government orders, it offers a simple test for our everyday decisions: will I be proud of this when the dust settles? In keeping this thought with us, we have a duty to continue to reach out to each other and rise above the tedium of inactivity in the knowledge that our sacrifice at this time will save lives—and that is an approach to be proud of.

Ronan Hunter Blair

From Rev Dr John Lochrie, Locum minister at Crosshill and Maybole Parish Church

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on that first Easter evening, Thomas was not there. Later he was told what had happened but Thomas could not believe it. So from then on he has been known as Doubting Thomas.

Doubt and faith are surely incompatible opposites. And yet can we really be so sure? After the story of the second gathering of the disciples when Thomas's doubts were banished when he met Jesus he disappears from the New Testament story. But by all accounts that was not the end of Thomas's part in the spread of the Gospel. Not all the early Christian writings found a place in the canon of Scripture. There is one book called the Gospel of Thomas which claims to set down his version of the story of Jesus.

It appears that when the apostle began the outreach of the Faith, when Paul went west to Asia Minor and Europe, Philip and Mark south to Egypt and Africa, Thomas journeyed east, and is supposed to have taken the Gospel as far as Kerala in southern India. Certainly when the Portuguese arrived there they found local traditions claiming that Thomas had brought the gospel and there were religious groups claiming to be his followers. Thomas himself, they were told, was buried near what was the great city of Madras.

If true, and we have no reason to reject the story as 'Fake News', it shows that for Thomas, doubt was the beginning of faith, not its end. That was the argument of the late Very Reverend Professor Robert Davidson, former Moderator of the General Assembly and the only academic to have lectured in all four of the Scottish Divinity Colleges. He always maintained that doubt was essential for the development of faith for it is by confronting our doubts that we ask the questions whose answers strengthen faith.



In this present situation we find ourselves confronted by many questions. It does seem to be the case that as we struggle to find the answers we are all finding ourselves led closer to God. Many churches have turned to technology to continue to reach out. One advantage is apparently that it is possible to know how many people are tuning in. It does appear that many ministers are finding that now a lot more people are watching and reading what is being put online than ever came to a church service. Out of the present darkness perhaps the light is shining as St John in the prologue to his Gospel said it would. A good prayer for us now is the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester :-

O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,

May I know You more clearly,

Love You more dearly,

Follow You more nearly. Amen.

One clear bright shining light has been shed by Captain Tom Morgan who at 99 began to walk 100 laps of his garden to raise funds for the NHS. What he is doing has attracted attention from all over the country, and far from the thousand pounds he and his family hoped to raise, the total at the time of printing was over £17,000,000. All is not gloom and despair just now.

Laura Kelly Fanucci has written her perspective on all of this that is comforting and yet challenges us at the same time. It has since gone viral. To coin a phrase!

"When this is over, may we never again take for granted:

A handshake with a stranger, full shelves at the store, conversations with neighbours, a crowded theatre...

Friday night out, the taste of communion, a routine checkup, the school rush each morning...

Coffee with a friend, the stadium roaring, each deep breath...

A boring Tuesday, Life itself.

When this ends, may we find that we have become more like the people we wanted to be...

we were called to be....

we hoped to be and may we stay that way...

better for each other because of the worst."

In a time of crisis, everyone pulls together. With all churches closed until further notice, local church members have come together to produce this newsletter. None will be distributed by hand but will be passed on electronically. If you know someone who may be interested in reading it, please send it on. The hope is that that some COMFORT is available. God bless.