

## Sermon fourth Sunday after Easter

Dear Archbishop, Bishop Ian, Revd Fathers and brothers and sisters in Christ, I wish you well on this fourth Sunday after Easter.

As we move along the slow road to the recovery of the health of the nation, this weekend sees the seventh week of lockdown. It has given rise to a multitude of emotions and behaviours, ranging from one end of the spectrum to the other. The negative responses I will not dwell upon, but the heart warming generosity that has characterised many British people has been a joy to behold.

We are traditionally a reserved people but have taken to showing emotional support for the front line workers of the nation, ranging from clapping for them on a Thursday evening, to making food and other items to show their care. Workers who have passed away and left young families have been supported by neighbours and their community to ensure that the children do not suffer any more than they have already.

It is not that the British people are ungenerous in normal times, but it has taken a worldwide and frightening pandemic to draw people together in a way that has perhaps only been shown during and after the World Wars. Lest we think this is a new problem I read only today that Sigmund Freud lost his daughter Sophie in 1920, aged 27, to Spanish flu in the worldwide outbreak after the First World War. Freud was, like us, in a lockdown, so could not travel to see his daughter in the days leading up to her death. Apart from such heart wrenching personal tragedies it is also astonishing to think that the outbreak killed more people after the war than those who were killed during the battles of the war itself. No doubt we can make modern day comparisons, with the losses to the current pandemic dwarfing the many conflicts that we have seen around the world in recent years. It makes you realise that for all the power of man's weapons, there are still many things in and outside of our earth that we cannot understand, control or explain.

The present lockdown has allowed opportunities for exercise and many who do not normally take it must be benefitting health-wise. As a regular exerciser there are some differences that I now observe in a morning compared to pre-lockdown(apart from being busier on the footpaths!)-the smell of the earth, bushes and flowers and the lower noise levels so that the birds can be heard more easily. I live on the outskirts of an industrial town which is normally dusty, not just because of the industry but because of the high level of sand in the soil which blows across the area and lands upon window ledges and cars. No doubt it is the cleaner atmosphere that is causing the incidence of pink campion flowers to be noticeably higher this year in an area which usually mainly sees the white version of this wild flower.

I have seen goldfinches this year, again not regular for this area. There used to be a woodpecker heard early spring, but not for a few years until I heard him once this year—that was a real treat. In a nearby lake there are swans, several varieties of ducks, coots as well as geese. I often see a small herd of deer on the farmland near the local beck, sometimes together but more often in ones or twos. On the beck there are moorhens and mallards. These things should make us reassess the important things in life—is it the collection of materialistic items or do we need to look again at nature and things spiritual? I am hopeful for the future that people who have enjoyed all of the things mentioned earlier will continue to want to do so.

In the reading for the fourth Sunday after Easter from the Epistle of Blessed James the Apostle it is said “Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” The things we are now able to see and hear more clearly because of the times we are in is a lesson for us all that we should appreciate them—we have been enabled through drastic circumstances to have a glimpse of things that most people have little time for normally. The

introit for the second Sunday after Easter states “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord”. Let us remember too the opening words of the first book of Moses called Genesis,” In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” As we continue our daily walk we can try to transform our sense of enjoyment into a sense of wonder at the miracle of what is around us, none of it created by man but by God. Thanks be to God.

Dean Brian Roberts