Homily - Fifth Sunday of Lent 2020

Four weeks ago we began our forty day pilgrimage through Lent, on our way to what we believed would be our community celebration Holy Week and Easter. On that Ash Wednesday we were reminded of our frailty, when we received ash on our foreheads. And we were advised by Jesus in the Gospel not to parade our faith in public but rather " when you pray go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you." How prophetic these words were then and how much they have become a reality in our lives five week later, as we continue our Lenten journey. As the predicted curve begins to rise we no longer need ash on our foreheads to remind us of our frailty. As self-isolation becomes the norm for most of us, our television rooms have now become the place where we can participate in Mass, say our prayers and receive spiritual communion. Yes indeed. The door is shut and the Father who is in that secret place sees our faith and listens to our prayers.

Our new experience is in fact a revival of the past, where prayer in the family home was part and parcel of daily life. I think the Lord is saying to us; rediscover me at home, in the privacy of your own room, with the door shut to all kinds of outside noises and interference. Rediscover me in the depths of your own heart in the privacy of your own isolation. Faith is a community activity but it is also a very personal, individual matter.

In the Old Testament the constant advice given by God to his people is; 'call on me in the day of distress and I will free you'. Well this is certainly a time of distress and we need to feel free to call on the Lord. I think most of us are a bit reluctant to call on the Lord at times. Why? Because we say to ourselves 'the Lord only hears from me when I am in trouble'. The invitation of the Lord has no if's, but's or and's. he simply says to us, without reservation; 'call on me in the day of distress'.

In these days I cannot but think of two particular characters; St Patrick and Robinson Crusoe. And, of course, you are saying to yourself; what could bring those two together? St. Patrick, a sixteen year old, minding sheep on a cold, wet mountainside near us here, in Lacken. With no one to talk to but the sheep; total isolation was his experience of everyday life. And in that isolation, loneliness and fear, he turned to God. You may also remember how Robinson Crusoe was left on the desert island all alone. He is smitten with fever. He was ready to perish. He rummaged through his sack and founds Bible, which he randomly opened at Psalm 50. The words on that page left an indelible mark on his life. Part of it reads; " call on me in the day of your distress and I will rescue you and then you shall honour me" In the novel we are told that on that night he prayed for the first time in his life. After that, in times of trouble he would open the bible at a random page, where he would read a verse that he believed God had made him open and read, and that would ease his mind. At a time of isolation and extreme danger both found a new place for God in their lives.

The present lockdown has imposed isolation on all of us; some within the confines of those living under one roof and for some of us total isolation. Much of our isolation is lifted through the media which we have; radio, television, mobile phones, the internet and so on. Equally jobs that should have been done within the house and never were, are suddenly attended to. But don't forget the benefits of isolation at this time, the kind of isolation which St Patrick and Robinson Crusoe knew and benefitted from. In the depth of fear which this virus places in all our hearts, turn to Psalm 50 and to God's consoling invitation; 'Call on me in the day of your distress and I will rescue you and then you shall honour me'. And add to that the words spoken by Jesus to us on Ash Wednesday this year; "when you pray go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you."

If you have a bible, read Psalm 50 in full; if you haven't one Mr Google can come to your rescue. This psalm has a lot to say to us.

 "Call on me in the day of your distress and I will rescue you."