

**Pastoral Letter to the Priests, Religious and People of the Diocese of Killala.
Holy Week 2020.**

On 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.” How prophetic these words were then and how much they have become a reality in our lives five week later. 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 many of us, our television rooms have now become the place where we can participate in Mass, say our prayers and receive spiritual communion.

Lent 2020 has seen much fear and distress. Serious illness and death from the virus. Uncertainty among so many with regard to their financial future. Families with young children confined to small spaces. The elderly in our nursing homes, their lives clouded by fear and anxiety. ‘Cabin fever’ among the active and the list goes on and on. And as the period of detention is extended, the dark clouds of the past few weeks fail to lift.

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 and you will honour me’. (Psalm 50) 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 like this. 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’.

This invitation comes from the God who loved us so much that he didn’t just allow his Son to come to us, he sent him. This Holy Week we remember the depth of God’s love for us and we gain new confidence in our freedom to call on him in these our days and weeks of distress. On Good Friday we will listen to Christ’s appeal to his Father in the day of his distress; ‘My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?’ Let us join Christ in his distress and call on God for deliverance; remembering that Christ’s prayer was answered with joy of the resurrection. And after this time of distress and suffering, joy will also return to us.

Great and genuine thanks has been expressed to so many at this time; doctors, nurses, carers, ambulance drivers, An Garda Sióchána, neighbours, the HSE and so on. Let me add one more; a sincere word of thanks to our priests who are always ready to continue their care for the sick and elderly, bury our dead with dignity and with prayer, offer faith and consolation to those who call on them, keep our churches open, where possible, celebrate Mass on their own and place themselves in danger of contracting this virus.

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 just now. “Call on me in the day of your distress, I will rescue you and you will honour me.” Add to this, the prayer of St John Henry Newman; ‘Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on... I do not ask to see the distant scene... one step enough for me.’ May the hope and joy of Easter become a reality in our lives and world.

+ John
Bishop of Killala