

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

**'THOUGH I SHOULD WALK IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
NO EVIL WOULD I FEAR, FOR YOU ARE NEAR ME' (Psalm 23).**

These words are from today's Mass and they offer us great reassurance in the topsy-turvy world we're living in. The way of living that we've always taken as normal has been turned upside down. Giving a hug to a friend is now a hostile act. Choosing self-isolation is not a rather eccentric choice, it's a kindly service to our neighbour. Keeping your distance is no longer rude, it's now polite and caring. Our homes were always an open door for relatives and close friends, now they're no-go areas. And the Church was always a place of welcome and comfort for 'those who labour and are overburdened'; now - when people most need it - its doors are closed.

Yes, we are living in an upside-down world. How we long for the day when we can return to normal in all these areas of our lives. But let's pray that it will be 'a new normal' – a normality that will permanently unlock the wellspring of goodness that the coronavirus experience has brought to the fore in people.

Though stressing the importance of social distancing, the crisis has – paradoxically – greatly enhanced our sense of togetherness and community. In particular, it has made us more sensitive to the plight of the vulnerable and the elderly – especially those in Care Homes whose plight the Government, and many of us too, had not given serious thought to. It has opened up new reserves of generosity and compassion that had been submerged in the bustle of so-called 'normal living'. We see this especially in the very many who are offering themselves voluntarily to help in whatever way they can. I see it concretely in the heroism of the care workers who come to Eton House each morning – putting their lives in line so that they can bring healing and hope to the most vulnerable. And then we see the emergence of a quality that had been largely forgotten in our 'taking for granted' culture – gratitude and appreciation. We see it in the huge numbers of people who clap each Thursday in appreciation of those who work in the front-line services, and in the amazing £30 million that Captain Tom has raised for the NHS.

We pray, that, by God's help, this selflessness and gratitude will become a permanent norm in the 'new normal' that politicians are talking about. "Wherever there is love, there is God", says the Taize hymn. Where Christ's supreme commandment of love is dominant in a society, Christ isn't far away. And perhaps the large increase in numbers who are watching the live-streaming of Mass is evidence that Christ is again becoming important in our culture. The more this happens, the more will our society "rediscover the value of the things that matter, and the worthlessness of so many things we once considered important". (Pope Francis). We will then be on the road to the 'fullness of life' that Jesus promises in today's Gospel.

Let us pray for one another at this time. As well as praying for those with the virus, we remember those who are finding lockdown particularly stressful and those who are very worried about their financial future.

May God bless us all and keep us safe.

Fr. Frank