

Bulletin Reflection 2021.07.18. Year B1. Week 16. Ordinary Time.

Come away to a lonely place with Jesus

“You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.”

This was the Gospel for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B. It was also the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday of Lockdown Time in our part of the world, of Masses without Congregation.

Tangibly the church has for now become a lonely place. But has it therefore turned into a lonely place spiritually? Not so, as long as the sanctuary lamp keeps glowing and Masses are being celebrated albeit with unoccupied pews. For how could we be alone when the Lord is with us? (Mt 28:20 – “I am with you always, to the close of the age.”) However, this is too easy to forget whenever we’re reminded of our mortal nature by the pain of physical separation.

In Gen 2:18 the Lord said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Hence, by design, we are not meant to be lonely and isolated. This statement preceded the first sin, which caused suffering and death to enter our human existence. Consequently, the timing of Gen 2:18 seems to suggest that loneliness (usually caused by spiritual afflictions and broken relationships) is fundamentally a greater threat to our wellbeing than bodily ailments. But alas, as we are exceedingly preoccupied with safekeeping the body, the soul is mostly overlooked. Especially in a Godless and rapidly secularising culture such as ours, it’s no surprise that spiritual needs aren’t considered ‘essential’ - the response to the pandemic merely confirms what has been for decades. Not to say the body is to be neglected, since as good stewards we must take care of this God-given gift. However, our priorities must be properly ordered according to Jesus’ words: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” (Mt 10:28) ‘Do not fear’, the Lord says. Yet the world - perhaps even those who believe - fear for the body far more than for the soul, as this is often the more palpable concern in our struggle for life.

Given this natural tendency, it appears somewhat odd that Christ should invite his disciples to ‘come away to some lonely place’. Did he want them to feel lonely? Certainly not. For at least a little while, he desired that his companions physically distance themselves from the crowd to seek solitude with God, to be more fully present with Him. Likewise, although we have not come to this lonely place (i.e. the lockdown) by choice, nevertheless Jesus invites us to stay with him in prayer rather than drown in the agony of physical isolation. According to him, loneliness is not our aim, but spiritual solitude in which to seek God’s loving presence and consolation.

Anyone can lament, but we who believe in the Lord don’t have to. For with faith and hope, we can still glimpse his light and hear his voice in our dark and noisy world. There is no need

to be afraid, once we realise that death has already been conquered by the Cross of Jesus Christ. So we go to him in love, for with love, we may still go on.