

Reflection for Thursday in Low Week.

Solemnity of St George 23/4/20

In today's mass we have a choice of Gospel readings so I have chosen to reflect on John 15:18-21.

Jesus said to his disciples: If the world hates you remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you.'

It seems a hard teaching from Our Lord, especially in today's society where we are expected to be nice to each other and not cause offence. But the Gospel message is counter cultural in the sense that the values of this world are often at odds with the values of Christ and his teachings. Therefore, the world sees us as a threat and wants to silence the Church.

The present lockdown of Churches is a case in point. When Boris Johnson announced the closure of Churches he implied that baptisms, weddings and other services were nothing more than social occasions, to be discouraged or banned. He seemed to have no concept of what the Mass means for us Catholics. To many people the Mass is just another Church service. They have little appreciation of the importance of the sacraments as a means of grace for us in our spiritual lives.

It makes you wonder whether we realise how much has been taken away from us during this lockdown of churches. Were you shocked and angry that we were to be cut off from such a big part of our lives, our spiritual lives? In this time of global pandemic, fear and uncertainty, the sacraments are what we seem to need the most! Yet we know that when God allows something to be taken from us, it might be to teach us a great truth. But what good could possibly come from being deprived of the sacraments?

Perhaps one of the reasons God has allowed this global pandemic is that He desires to bring about greater devotion and love for what is holy and sacred, namely, the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. We know that many in the Church have taken for granted the immense gift of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist.

Is it possible that God is allowing Catholics to be denied the sacraments to awaken us to the fact that His Real Presence has been uncared for and unloved by so many in recent years? How many times has He been received unworthily in Holy Communion? We should remember the words of St Paul, *"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying"* (1 Cor. 11:27–30). Many of the Fathers of the Early Church used to say how important it was to adore Our Lord in the Eucharist before receiving Him in Holy Communion, as a sign of our faith in the real presence.

Bishop Fulton Sheen, whose cause for canonisation has begun, used to spend an hour every day in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He said he even composed his homilies in the presence of Our Lord. However, when he had to travel and could not go to adoration during the day when the churches were open, he would find the nearest Catholic Church, park his car in the car park, and make his adoration hour there, as close to Jesus as he could get. That requires great faith. Perhaps he got his inspiration from St Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb where Jesus's body was laid just to be close to the body of Christ?

When the churches were closed it didn't stop Fulton Sheen from making his adoration hour in the car park. The boulder didn't stop Mary Magdalene from visiting the Body of Christ. Neither should the current lockdown stop us from getting as close to Jesus as we possibly can. In fact, it should make us want Him all the more!

Deacon Kevin