

## PASTORAL LETTER FOR EASTER 2020 FROM BISHOP ALAN

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The first Holy Week- almost two thousand years ago- saw world-changing events happen with bewildering speed. Jesus received a King's welcome in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, by Friday he had been crucified to death but on Easter Sunday his disciples were proclaiming his Resurrection.

In any other year I would be encouraging you to take time out of your busy schedule and journey with Jesus in the Holy Week Liturgy and in personal prayer, but this year our churches are closed, many of us are confined to our homes and, as one NHS worker grimly remarked, many of us are now living a three day week- yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Yet our Catholic Christian Faith is very clear that whether in times of suffering or joy, light or darkness- 'Fix your thoughts on Jesus the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess... Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the Pioneer and Perfecter of our Faith' (Hebrews 3.1, 12.2).

In the annual rich liturgical and devotional life of the Church this is obvious and can become even routine, but now, in this time of the Covid19 virus, our churches are closed, people are suffering and dying and we are all living in a radically different world.

In that first Holy Week, the last week of our Lord's life on this earth, the first Christians made little sense of what was happening. The apostles fled from Gethsemane, Peter denied Jesus three times and the Lord died almost alone with just his Mother, St John and one or two others.

Easter Sunday changed everything. Mary Magdalen, filled with love for her friend Jesus, went to the tomb to anoint a body; hope and love had triumphed over paralysis and despair. Mary was the first witness to the empty tomb; much more she was, in the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Apostle of the Apostles (Apostolorum Apostola) and she shared her excitement and joy with the apostles.

Every new generation of Christians discovers and proclaims the crucified and risen Lord- 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13.8). In these dark and difficult days of the pandemic Mary Magdalen's longing for life and healing, even when others were plunged into loss and despair, invites all of us to trust God in Christ absolutely.

At His Last Supper our Lord told His disciples, 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13.15,17). In these challenging days we need to support each other and, especially, look after and pray for the vulnerable and elderly. Our priests are continuing to celebrate Mass for their parishioners and, whenever possible, the Sacraments and other pastoral support are being offered to the people of God. Each and every act of kindness, in imitation of our Lord, reminds us that we are truly blessed by God.

The Holy Father continues to be a source of strength and inspiration - 'In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: He is risen and is living by our side' (Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica, 27 March 2020).

I wish you many blessings this coming Easter and in the future,

Devotedly in Christ and Mary,

+Alan Williams, sm  
**Bishop of Brentwood**

9 April 2020