

Pause for thought (Based on John 14 : 1 - 7)

Part of our experience of the world during this time of pandemic has been the distress of separation. Not necessarily separation from everyone, depending on where we live or how we work; nor separation in terms of basic communication. Through various means we are writing to each other, calling one another and seeing each another. Nevertheless, there's a high degree of separation. We can't decide to meet for a coffee or a pint in the pub; many still cannot work nor travel together; summer holiday plans have been shelved, for now.

This experience has reduced our society to a degree of paralysis, indecision and unproductiveness that we so desperately want to end. Separation continues between those who must work on the front line and those who must stay at home; those who have the wealth to provide for themselves and those whose poverty deepens; those who are inaccessible in hospital or care homes and those they love; and most painfully, separation from those who have died.

Separation is at the root of the Gospel message for this week. Jesus talks to his disciples about the prospect of them being separated from one another by his passion and death. Indeed, it is a word of consolation for those of the Second World War generation who have truly felt separation from loved ones and remembered them particularly on VE day with love and gratitude.

In the Gospel passage, faced with the prospect of separation by the events which were soon to unfold, there was a pain on all sides for Jesus and his disciples. His imminent departure was a crisis for their little community. It would play out for the disciples not only in emotional turmoil, but also in fear and indecision.

But Jesus explains that his departure, and the emptiness that it will leave in the disciple's hearts, is an opportunity for their rebirth. He

encourages them to have faith, to place their trust in him, and not to be disturbed. If, thanks to the power of trust, those words come alive in the hearts of the disciples, then they will be able to move away from loss to creativity, from turmoil to courage, from death to life.

Over the past few weeks there have been many heart-warming stories in our school community providing encouragement and hope during the days of uncertainty: determination and success with online education; people learning to cook or play musical instruments; beginning to master another language; walking; running; painting. Further afield Italians have been singing opera from their balconies; some have joined online fitness programmes whilst others have engaged in zoom bingo. Time has also been spent with recreational activities which used to be central to the lives of previous generations. These have included old-fashioned parlour games; knitting and embroidery; pickling and slow cooking, as well as the vanishing art of face-to-face conversation (within immediate families, of course).

May I suggest the words that reach us, too, through the gospel are a sense of encouragement, celebration and hope. Jesus invites the disciples (and us) to invest trust and dependence in him. By inviting them (and us) to enter that special darkness we call faith, Jesus urges his people to transform the terror of feeling abandoned into courage. Perhaps God is preparing the future, inviting a new, different and deeper relationship with him and each other.

With my continued prayers and blessing  
Father Andrew Hutchinson

