

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

In the pre-Covid 19 days it was rare in polite conversation that Christians be asked to account for their faith or to explain why it was they still went to church. Whether it be in the coffee shop or the pub, the dinner party or the casual encounter on the street, casual reference might be made to church or its activities, yet religious faith was assumed to be such a personal matter as not to be subject to any probing or questioning which might embarrass the participants in the conversation. Thanks to the dramatic events which are re-shaping our world and the many unanswered questions the incursion of the Coronavirus into our lives have raised, much of our conversation today takes place through social media or in hushed mobile telephone conversations as people tread their solitary path through the park or empty streets as they avail of the hour allotted for exercise. How often does God get a mention? Do we ever resort to a *theological* explanation of the succession of events beyond our immediate understanding, do we ever think to see a *providential* hand in the shaping of events? These are difficult questions which few attempt to answer, although it is to be hoped that once we are more reconciled to the new realities voices from within the Church and believers with Christian convictions may attempt to relate our shared faith to an understanding of the new world as it unfolds.

Today, in the reading the Church puts before us from a letter ascribed to the Apostle Peter, the early disciples of Jesus are challenged and indeed encouraged to explain to others what precisely it is in their Christian faith that makes them people of such hope. We are running short on hope at the present time for perfectly understandable reasons. Fear and confusion about our future have taken the upper hand. Indeed it might well be claimed that so dark is the immediate future that we dare not hope. Those early Christians to whom Peter wrote had every reason to be despondent: they were few, their living conditions were precarious, they were living in a society which was either largely indifferent to them or, in the case of the Jews who attended the synagogue with them, openly hostile. And yet they were hopeful: convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead, that his death had been the definitive redeeming sacrifice that opened the gates of heaven to them, and that he would return at the close of the age - all these truths they cherished gave them hope. And Peter encouraged them not to be shy about sharing these convictions with others and explaining why they gave them such hope.

Perhaps as we struggle to express solidarity with friends, family, parishioners and particularly the vulnerable in our midst in these current challenging times, the best and most lasting contribution we can make to their wellbeing is to explain *why* we ourselves are people of hope, what it is we hope for and how those cherished hopes will be realized. And in sharing hope, we might become more hopeful ourselves.

Father Patrick