**Reflection for Fifth Sunday of Easter – 10 May 2020**

**(Acts 7.55-end; Psalm 31.1-5; I Peter2.2-10; John14.1-14)**

Home. Most of us have spent far more time at home than usual in the last seven weeks. Some of us have been confined there. Many have had to sacrifice its protection from Covid 19 to go out to work and support others during this pandemic.

Home, confinement and sacrifice feature in today’s scriptures and the two events which happen to be commemorated on Friday, 8th May – the 75th anniversary of VE Day and Mother Julian of Norwich’s Feast Day.

The Second World War affected millions across the globe, and it is hard to take in the magnitude of the sacrifices and suffering involved for so many when on such a massive scale. It’s the same with this pandemic. The media focus daily on a few individual stories to help make real and personal what would otherwise be such raw, indigestible statistics of loss and suffering.

Since confinement has been at the forefront of so many conversations, and because of Mother Julian, it’s perhaps not surprising that the very personal Second World War story that came to my mind was of Anne Frank. She and her family were *forced* into hiding and confinement with a few others for two years in an annexe above offices in Amsterdam. Whereas Mother Julian *chose* to live as a recluse in a cell attached to a church in Norwich, having survived the 14th century’s ‘Black Death’ (the ‘Plague’), the most fatal pandemic recorded in human history.

While in confinement, Anne wrote the world-famous diary[[1]](#endnote-1) that was published posthumously after the War which she did not survive; and Mother Julian wrote the earliest surviving book[[2]](#endnote-2) we have in the English language written by a woman. Both books remain best sellers because each speaks so beautifully and honestly of their authors’ self-reflections during confinement.

In 1999, Anne was named as one of Time Magazine’s 100 most important people of the 20th century for good reason. Through the record of a child going through puberty, from dependence to independence in such extreme circumstances, she shows us the highs and lows every human made in the image of God lives through.

We see such immense courage and hope on the one hand, in contrast to the everyday selfishness and petty squabbling over small things that dominate daily domesticate life. Anne can be in the depths of despair at one moment, about the terrible food and strain of the miserable atmosphere, but then lifted from it by an unexpected small gift or a glimpse of the night sky.

Anne sounds like a Psalmist when she says: “When I look up at the sky, the clouds, the moon and the stars make me calm and patient... prepared to face every blow courageously”. She shows us that when seen with the heart, the commonplace is holy, and the ordinary is far more extraordinary than we think or realise.

Seeing with the heart led Mother Julian to “desire to know what was our Lord’s meaning” - of his birth, ministry, passion, death and rising - and then to understand “love was his meaning”. The kind of love that is not soft and emotional, but rock hard and costly. The kind of love that gives us the ability to put ourselves in someone else’s place, accurately assess their needs and be ready to supply them.

It’s a eucharistic taking, breaking and sharing of ourselves for the sake of others. It’s what we saw in the generation that lived through the Second World War, and is now being asked of them again during this pandemic, along with others so susceptible to the virus.

When wars and pandemics, or more personal crises hit us completely unawares, our lives change dramatically in a split second. One moment you know where you are now and where you are heading in life, and the next you do not. We feel we have lost control and it’s frightening. But the hard lesson we learn through such crises is that we have lost only the *illusion* of control. We never had it in the first place to lose it.

What we do have, and never lose, is the choice how to respond to the fear, pain and suffering of wars and pandemics with the costly, rock hard love that gives us the courage and hope to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes and meet their needs.

What we do have, and never lose, is the ability to see with our heart that love is our Lord’s meaning, and to trust in the Gospel that assures us whoever has seen Jesus has seen our Father, in whose house there are many dwelling places prepared and waiting for us. House, here, is not limited to a physical building but includes the wider concept of household, family and home – the place we truly belong, wherever we happen to be.

We have a strange hunger in our hearts for home- a place of complete safety from the wars and pandemics of this world, let alone the vast unknown universe of which we are such tiny part. Irrespective of how secure we may usually be, we can often still sense a sudden feeling like homesickness for a place that we hope misses us as much as we miss it. It’s good to know you belong somewhere, even if you are not there yet.

None of us is home yet. We are on our way. It’s a slow and at times painful pilgrimage; a lifetime of taking, breaking and sharing of ourselves for the sake of others; building relationships and bridges of trust and love with everyone, even with those we dislike or distrust, all through the painful muddles of our daily lives.

We may not realise it, or recognise him when we see Him, but the Christlike God whose meaning is love is beside us every step of the way, trying always to take us by the hand and lead us to the dwelling place prepared for us in His family household. Home.

**Extracts from Anne Frank’s last diary entry (1 August 1944)**

So the nice Anne is never seen in company. She's never made a single appearance, though she almost always takes the stage when I'm alone. I know exactly how I'd like to be, how I am… on the inside. But, unfortunately, I'm only like that with myself.

If I'm being completely honest, I'll have to admit that it does matter to me, that I'm trying very hard to change myself, but that I'm always up against a more powerful enemy.

I get cross, then sad, and finally end up turning my heart inside out, the bad part on the outside and the good part on the inside, and keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be if… if only there were no other people in the world.

**Mother Julian (born 1343)**

Would you know your Lord’s meaning in this?   
Learn it well. Love was his meaning.

Who showed it to you? Love.  
What did he show you? Love.  
Why did he show you? Love.

1. The Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank (first published in 1947)  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Revelations of Divine Love (first published in 1670 entitled

   *XVI Revelations of Divine Love, Shewed to a Devout Servant of Our Lord, called Mother Juliana, an Anchorete of Norwich: Who lived in the Dayes of King Edward the Third)* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)