

Homily by Br John

I have never before been asked to say Mass on my own – even the ‘I’ at the beginning of this seems offensive, and the rebel in me would do otherwise, and there, perhaps, lies a clue to the true nature of priesthood, as not a personal possession of the priest but a grace given for the service of others. The readings of today, and the past few days, bring something of this tension to the surface – between what we may want and what ‘service’ demands. So, it’s a Gethsemane again, and whatever the conscious reasonings of the powers that be – including perhaps future gain -the dynamic that is being invoked is profoundly Christian. Stay at home not only for your own good but for the good of others or, even more radically, ‘stay at home’ even if not for your own good. This is sacrificial language. And most people ‘get it’, though they might never cast it in Christian or, even religious terms. If we follow the logic of this through, Christ dies on a cross essentially isolated from every one else, with those who love him kept at a distance, whether voluntary or not. And the state’s reasoning that this is for the good of others, for the good of all, rings hollow for his friends and family. Until, that is, a new graced understanding comes with his resurrection. What looked like disaster was, in fact, a liberation for us all – but only some will ‘get this’. John’s gospel is full of this new perception which some ‘get’ and others do not, which can make it appear to be mystical in an unhealthy dualistic sense, ‘us’ versus ‘them’, those in the know against ‘the world’, the priest saying Mass on his own because he is special. No, that’s not it at all, the priest says Mass not on his own but with all you present too, indeed, as Teilhard de Chardin came to realise, it’s a Mass for the world, and indeed all creation. It’s a sacrifice in which we all share.

Father

I want those you have given me
to be with me where I am

...

I have made your name known to them
and will continue to make it known
so that the love with which you loved me may be in them,
and so that I may be in them.

Will you share my priesthood as I share yours? It’s a kind of death, a passing over,
Spring.