

PBS MASS; THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

“Behold the hour cometh...that ye shall be scattered every man to his own and shall leave me alone : and yet i am not alone because the Father is with me.”

There is a world of difference between loneliness and solitude. To be alone and to experience the desert of having no relationships or regular human contact defies the ideals of God as laid down in the creation narrative of Genesis that “man should not be on his own”. We are made for relationship. This is what makes this moment in our worlds history just as disastrous as a pandemic, the enforced isolation of people who would otherwise choose the company of others. I fear the results of the loneliness that people will feel through this will see a sharp rise in mental illness.

Loneliness is not good. But this state of being must not be confused with solitude. Solitude is altogether different. This is the form of life that many religious and monastic people take in order to dwell solely in the company of God; and for others not called to this way of life, solitude can be a vital part of faith, prayer life and contemplation. When I think of solitude, i think of those prayerful men and women who live their lives as Carthusians monks and nuns. Some would say that this is an extreme way of life and yes it is a life that a person has to be called to. And yet these people know and experience the Father who walks with them. A Carthusian once said, “in the monastery every cell, every flagstone and every blade of grass pulses with the life of God.”

And St Bruno the founder of the Carthusians himself said, “Only experience reveals what benefits the solitude and silence of the desert bring to those who have it.” Loneliness can make every day pointless, can make the world too big to possess, and to bewildering to understand. Loneliness is being cast into insignificance. Solitude on the other hand is to be in sweet company with the Divine, to be held by the hand by one unknown and yet known, to be in fellowship with the whole world.

Our Lord offers this gift to all of us. Christ came to be our Way to the Father, to redeem us from separation and loneliness, to be called by a voice familiar, to walk in a world that is too small to contain Him, that we might know as He knew, what it is to be alone and yet not alone.