

Hosanna



Dear Holy Joes,

I am writing to assure you, that you are not alone or forgotten but rather very much cared for, loved and deeply treasured in my heart and within the hearts of other Passionists who serve our family of Holy Joe.

“This is the Lentiest Lent I've ever Lented.” Days ago, none of us could have imagined that we would be giving up so much for Lent. All of us have given up our familiar routines, our social freedoms, our physical connections, our communal life. But many have given up so much more, including their jobs, their health, their financial security, and their peace of mind. I know that this season is wearing on you. The uncompromising isolation; the chaos of managing kids and online education while working from home; the challenges of staying safe; the concern for loved ones near and far. We are wondering how long it will last. In this time there is confusion. There is a lot that is unknown. There is a dearth of leadership. There is fear. There is sickness. There is death. We are also seeing the beauty and resiliency of humanity. There are balcony sing-alongs and social media read alouds. There are healthcare workers who give more than seems humanly possible and churches learning to change with the times as they learn to livestream, Hoy Joes tried though!

Here we are in the final week of lent. It is the week we call holy week. In reality, as we remember the story, we see that there are a great many events of this week we would be hard-pressed to call holy. There was betrayal. There was denial, apathy, murder, deep loss. There was death. Yet even in the midst of all of this – there was something else. There was a shared meal with loved ones. There was a healed soldier. There was a forgiven thief and a centurion who believed. There were faithful women who stayed to the end and disciples who supported each other in their grief. There was an empty tomb. There was new life. There was resurrection.

In the midst of all of this, we find ourselves looking at Psalm 118 together. It opens and closes with the lines, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!” In the middle beginning at verse 10, we hear the story of a King who finds himself and his army surrounded by the enemy in battle. He is trapped in a dangerous place and he is all but defeated.

This psalm was a favourite of Martin Luther, who began the Protestant Reformation. In the 1530s, Luther stayed several months at the Coburg Castle in Ausburg; and while he was there on the wall of the room where he worked, he wrote the words to verse 17 — “I shall not die, but live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.” For him, this was a personal way of living and it is the central message of the Psalm. The psalmist literally faced death and destruction. Martin faced the threat of it as well. And yet they both chose to live; to remember that their lives are saved by God.

These days, death certainly feels like more of a reality than it did before for many of us. And yet, the call is still to live. Live as you find space and time at home to slow your pace. Live as share life with neighbours from your respective porches. Live even as you strive to withdraw from the physical community and embrace new ways to connect with your community. Live as you check in on your loved ones. Live as you worship online. Live as you restrain from hoarder shopping and live as you help an at-risk friends get the necessities they need. As the psalmist says, “The Lord is God, and he has given us light.” At the beginning of this holy week, we celebrate, with our palm branches and Hosanna cries, the light of Christ that came into this world; and as the week wears on we hold on to that promise that no matter how dim that light gets, even if it seems to go out, there is always new life and resurrection.

I miss you deeply, and pray for you daily.

