

Homily. 5th Sunday of Lent. Year.A. 28/29 March 2020.

Earlier today I was scrolling through my Instagram feed (Yes, I'm on Instagram, too) when I came across 2 photos of the dome of St. Peter's; nothing unusual about this. What grabbed my attention was that these photos were taken from the small student rooms at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, better known to us as the Urban University which overlooks the Vatican from the Janiculum hill.

This University serves people from across the globe, many of them young and far from their families, who've come to deepen their knowledge of our Catholic tradition and Christian faith. Locked down as they are in Italy due to the pandemic sweeping our planet, a student looked out his window and snapped those pictures sharing them with many people like me here far away in Australia. The white dome and exterior of St. Peter's, framed in these shots by the small red and white flowers in planter boxes outside this unknown student's window, brought me a moment of hope.

The message the student included under his photos speaks for itself; Stay Home. Pray Together, he said. I thought of him and so many like him in Rome, Italy, Australia and across the world who can only glimpse beauty and hope from a window or doorway because of our restrictions, all in order to keep ourselves and our communities well and safe. We can see life and the changing seasons outside or on our short excursions for essentials, but inside we have each other. If, like me, you're living alone with your family scattered and friends bunkered down then we have people's faces and memories filling our hearts, lifting up our minds to God in prayer for God is always with us and by our side.

Jesus was very friendly with a family at Bethany. In the gospels we hear several times of Martha and Mary, but in this weekend's gospel we also get to hear of their brother, Lazarus. A message was sent to Jesus, like a prayer, a heartfelt request, saying that His friend, Lazarus, was ill. Feeling this deeply nevertheless Jesus chose not to go to them immediately. He waited for the right time, for God's time to take action. Like the student trapped in Rome and like many of us worried about our families and friends somewhere far away unable to go to them, Jesus let some days pass Him by before journeying to them. When He did go to Bethany it was with God's purpose, to affirm faith and to bring Life and re-birth out of suffering, sadness and the darkness of a sealed tomb.

Upon arriving, finding Lazarus already dead and buried, He said to Martha that He was the Resurrection and the Life and she believed Him. Later, Mary came along saying that had He come earlier her brother would not have died. What follows is the shortest verse in all scripture, two words only; Jesus wept. Seeing the broken family, hearing their grief stricken friends and feeling His own loss painfully Jesus did what you and I now must do. He turned His total attention to God, ordered the dank and smelly tomb opened and facing it said words which have to resound in us; Lazarus, here! Come out! Still wrapped in his grave garments Lazarus emerged into the light of day, new born, with Jesus adding; Unbind him, let him go free.

This is what we need to hear too, isn't it? To hear Jesus say to us; Come here! Come out, be unbound and set free once again. I'm sure it's what the student at the Urban who took those two photos is dying to hear,

isolated so far away from his family and friends in Africa, India, Asia, or maybe even here in Australia, for we don't know where he's from.

At this moment in time we're like the Bethany sisters, waiting for Jesus to respond to our messages, prayers and cries. There is one important difference though for you and me and it's this; We already know by the light of our faith that Jesus will come, calling us out of our isolated graves, ordering us to be unbound and one way or another be set free. Until then and in God's timing we do as our unknown student said, we stay home and we pray together hungering and thirsting for the community and life we've been enforced in these testing days to leave behind.