

Homily. 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 18/19 January 2025.

A few months shy of 5 years ago we were all in lockdown due to the arrival of COVID 19. This was true across the world and nowhere more so than in Italy which was being devastated by the pandemic. Lent and Easter as we had known them were cancelled. Instead we had Zoom, Facebook, videos and phone calls to stay in touch, trying to keep our faith intact as we made the best we could of what we couldn't control.

Into this turmoil on the dark evening of Friday 27th March stepped a lone old man dressed in white. Slowly he shuffled his feet across the wet paving stones of St. Peter's Square as he made his way towards a Cross. This should have been Pope Francis' 'Urbi et Orbi' address and blessing to the Eternal City of Rome and to the World, but what good were more words given the circumstances? Instead he chose to give us a sign, one that the media around the globe picked up and disseminated. I'm sure that many of us can remember this event even now. His sign said that in the darkness of our isolation Christ was with us; that as our hopes for the future seemed to be slipping away from us like water over those ancient pavers, the Cross of Gods love remained rock solid, leading us onward.

Francis is a man of signs. His first visit was to the Island of Lampedusa, that place where Africans wash up dead and alive after crossing the Mediterranean Sea in unsafe boats and rafts. His first Holy Thursday was spent in a Rome Prison for youth, a sign he continues to offer yearly. In this sign-giving mission he imitates Jesus Christ, the great giver of signs.

The thing about signs is that we have to read and interpret them rightly. St. John tells us that his first was at a wedding at Cana in Galilee to which he and Mary, his mother, had been invited. What is the significance of this sign? What is it telling us about Jesus and Mary, about God and about God's Kingdom? At the least it says that Mary matters, that she is on our side in a crisis and that she isn't to be ignored. It also tells us that Jesus listens and acts for us and that these acts are ones of goodness and plenty. A wedding feast was and remains an image of the reign of God and of our heavenly home. There, only the best wine and foods will be served and they won't ever give out or dry up. In this miracle a young couple and their families were saved from shame on their big day, just like Christ saves us from our sins, shame and fears, putting things right again.

Signs are how Jesus works; a few words are spoken, but it's the acts that speak volumes; the abundant feeding of a huge crowd from 5 loaves and 2 fish; the touching and healing of a leper; the forgiveness of the paralysed man amongst many others and finally the raising of children and ultimately of Lazarus from the dead. These are signs of the Divine, of God's work for us. They're where we get our Church Sacraments from.

There are other important signs, too, that we have to understand; signs in the natural world telling us about the future of our planet; signs in the worlds of politics and finance that point towards good or ill, a better or a worse way that's coming; signs in our bodies and in the arts of all kinds that show the state of our societies and our souls and minds. Heeding them and reading them in the Spirit's wisdom is our way to hope. Wake up to the signs then so we may live and flourish, not wither and die away.