

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE
FOR EASTER 2020.

My brothers and sisters the “*peace of Jesus Christ be with you*”. All around us we see the hope, joy and new life of Spring as growth is taking place, trees beginning to bud forth and birds are singing and busy building their nests. Yet, in the midst of all this we endeavour to cope with the chilling challenge of Covid-19 and its consequences of death, disruption and disillusionment. We are living through a very traumatic time not just for Ireland but for the whole world. The results will be far-reaching in terms of physical, psychological, emotional health and the economic situation.

Not being able to visit with our family and friends at Easter time is a huge sacrifice. Thanks to modern technology and social media, however, we can still keep in touch with our loved ones and ensure that those who are isolated will be remembered and assured that we are thinking of them. This microscopic virus has effectively shut down the world in many respects, yet this challenge brings out the best in people and has awakened in us the need for connectivity and community. We witness the goodness, generosity, and gentleness being exercised in a very powerful, profound and personal way. This becomes abundantly evident in the way people responsibly accept the restrictions for the good of all. This has impinged on Church goers who cannot attend Mass, on families where funerals are restricted, on weddings and baptisms.

At times it is very difficult to see above and beyond the immediate situation, particularly if it is painful and life-threatening. As a people of hope we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These days our faith acknowledges that the execution of Jesus must have plunged so many of his disciples into despair.

Nobody knew what was to come next or even if there would be a future. The hopes of the earliest disciples of Jesus seemed to run aground on Calvary and be buried with him in the Tomb. All of us who have lost loved ones will know the experience of the day after the burial when time seems to stand still. Similarly for the disciples on Holy Saturday; nobody knew how long the Saturday would last. Saturday, that in-between-day of doubt and despair when time stands still. That Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday was about abandonment, disappointment and disillusionment. At times we feel that Holy Saturday is being re-presented now for us as we cope with the challenge of Covid-19 which leads us to a re-evaluation of what is important in our society.

The events of the Middle East 2000 years ago provide us with a perspective on our present situation. Social distancing, closed doors and fear stalk the streets and the thoroughfares of cities across our world. The followers of Jesus were forced to meet in fear behind locked doors. It was to this situation that Jesus came into their midst with the words "*peace be with you*". This Easter we ponder the contradiction between death and risen life. We realise that our own faith is being tried and tested in the present situation. When the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples He carried the wounds of suffering, pain and death as He had been executed on the Friday. These continue to be the marks of the risen life. Prior to the onslaught of the coronavirus we prided ourselves on the progress which humanity had made in various areas. We boasted of our independence and control. Perhaps now, we are beginning to recognise our fragility and vulnerability, that we are not self-reliant and that we depend on God. And the God in whom we believe does not abandon us.

St. John reminds us that Jesus “*breathed on them*”, performing a kind of artificial respiration on his faltering followers. He said, “*receive the Holy Spirit*”. We remember and we pray for those on ventilators in I.C.U. units and those at the frontline who are ministering to them. We take responsibility in the present and actively pursue the means of containing the virus and finding a cure for it. At the same time, in hope, we look to a new future. However, the future will have to include and make provision for the concrete memories of the coronavirus with which we cope today.

Our faith in Christ’s rising from the dead enables us to embrace the present situation and at the same time opens us to new possibilities. Already we witness signs of hope in the goodness, generosity, altruism, sensitivity towards and support for others.

May the risen Christ bless us with the peace that will enable us to recognise that the Lord is journeying with us as we cope with this new challenge. I want to reassure you of my prayers and I ask for remembrance in yours. At this time my daily Masses are being celebrated for:

- The front-liners in the fight against Covid-19;
- For the success of medical researchers in the hopes that they will discover a lasting cure for Covid-19 and a vaccine to prevent it;
- For all infected by this virus;
- For the safety of all families and homes who have members in isolation;
- For all those dying alone that they will feel the presence of the Lord in their suffering;
- I will be remembering all families as they cope with the anxiety and fears that this virus has visited on them.

Yours sincerely,
+Michael Neary
Archbishop of Tuam