

National Youth Sunday 2020 – TOGETHER

The recent COVID-19 Pandemic has affected every part of our lives; from the way we work to the way we socialise with friends and family. One of the biggest changes we have all had to adapt to is social distancing. We know that measures put in place are to keep us safe but have resulted in many of us feeling both isolated and marginalised.

With this imposed distance from others, some have felt an increasing distance between themselves and God, perhaps due to the hardships the pandemic has caused. However, in the midst of all these trials and hardships, God calls us to new opportunities and a life of hope. We look forward to a time where we can freely get together with family and friends.

There is something special about being together – being part of a community – that makes us whole and gives us a sense of purpose. Of course, this includes those physically close to us like our friends and family, but also means standing in solidarity with our worldwide community. Solidarity happens when you and I realise that every human being is a brother or sister to us. Solidarity, or 'togetherness', is why, as well as looking after our loved ones, we have clapped for carers, worried about people we don't know and supported charities all over the world. We look to Jesus in Scripture for inspiration, as he defends the voiceless countless times, and tells us one of the greatest commandments is to "love your neighbour as yourself." (Mark 12:31). Jesus recognised that we cannot live as solitary, independent beings, but we were made to be together with others, both physically and in spirit.

These words of Jesus bring together the whole human family. We only need to look to the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 5:3-12) to see that Jesus' message extends to all who are isolated and marginalised, and all those who work to create a fairer world and bring about the Kingdom of God. We all have a longing and a desire to be happy, to have our life 'together'. Jesus, through the Beatitudes, shows us the way there.

However, this is no easy task. How do we discover happiness in this life? In a society filled with vain and empty illusions, many of us feel the overwhelming desire to seize the things the world tells us we need to find real joy, only to discover they don't quite have what we are looking for but we keep trying anyway. If we want to live a life of real joy 'together' with Christ and in solidarity with our global brothers and sisters, we need the help of the Father, who so carefully and lovingly created our world and everyone in it.

In hard times, we must try with all our might to trust in the will of God, rather than what we think we need. By trusting that God's plan for us is better than our own plans, we free ourselves from our own, often limiting, self-expectations and self-image. We free ourselves from the trap of who we think we have to be. We become free to be the person God created. We are more 'together' with God, ourselves and each other. We are free to be witnesses to our faith, to build bridges rather than walls and to live out the Beatitudes, not for our benefit, but the good of others. If we are willing to live a life of 'togetherness', be sure in the knowledge that Christ is our guide and, true to his word, He will be with us every step of the way.