

John 11: 32-44

Today I'd like to begin by affirming that our faith in Christ – our faith in the goodness of God is the foundation of our shared belief. And, I think we see this faith reflected back to us in the blessings that we experience – we see our faith reflected back to us and affirmed in the love that we share with our family and friends – we sometimes see this faith reflected back to us in our work and in our interests – we see our faith affirmed by the beauty of creation that we see around us.

But, in times of difficulty and distress, many people find themselves asking questions about their faith – in times of doubt and uncertainty, we often ask questions about the priorities and the beliefs that prompt our actions in everyday life. And, we call this a crisis of faith.

As many of you know, for a number of years, I worked as a Silver Chain chaplain – I worked with the critically ill and the dying. And, I often found myself talking to people who were struggling with their faith – people who were struggling with unexpected news – people who found themselves asking questions about the priorities that shaped their lives – priorities that sometimes seemed less important to them - when sick or dying. Again, we could describe this as a crisis of faith.

I think we're starting to see signs of this struggle in the wider community – in the world around us. The news of those effected by the Covid 19 virus seems to be spreading – we're hearing stories about the sick and suffering in places like China and Italy – in places like New York and now here in Australia. For most of us, this virus is a cause for concern – it has prompted profound grief and uncertainty and loss in the lives of many.

And, in a way, I think we see something of this grief and loss in our Gospel reading today – we see Mary's crisis of faith – we see Mary (the brother of Lazarus) reach out to God in her grief and confusion. And then, we see God's response – in the love and care that Jesus offers we see God respond. In the words of our Gospel:

"...then Jesus came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'take the stone away.' Martha, the sister of the dead man said, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus come out!' the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth. Jesus said to them, 'unbind him and let him go...'"

There's a lot happening in this reading – so much to talk about. Through the faith and the ministry of Jesus we're shown the love of God – we see Mary's faith and hope affirmed and renewed – we see a life that gives life. Within the context of his life, Jesus offered hope to the people around him - he reminded them that God was near and ready to bless them – over and over again. Jesus showed God's love to the people who mourned the death of Lazarus – he shared Martha's grief. And, when Lazarus was called out of that dark tomb – when his bandages were stripped away, the grace of God set all of them free – they were all raised up – Lazarus and Martha – their family and their friends. They were all raised up – given the gift of hope – they were all renewed. This is how we measure the life and the ministry of the faithful in God's church.

As we pause to think a bit about the fear and uncertainty that seems to be so prominent in the wider community, we have an opportunity to consider the example of our Lord – the one who affirms faith and hope by being faithful and hopeful. As I said earlier, we see our faith grow and mature when we see it reflected back to us – when we see it in the love that we share with family and friends – we see faith affirmed in the ministry of the faithful and the consideration of others. Surely, this was the

experience of Mary and Lazarus – their family and their friends. In our Gospel we see them grow – we see them renewed and strengthened.

Like those who have gone before us, I think we are called to be faithful servants on the kingdom of God – we are called to live holy lives – we are called to encourage this hope and healing – this growth and renewal within the hearts of those around us (especially in these troubling times).

Often when we talk about the saints, we talk about the great people who have gone before us - the great founders of the Church – people like St Peter, disciple and founder of the Church in Jerusalem. We might find ourselves thinking about people like St Paul, who was one of the great missionaries of the early Church - or Saint Francis feeding the poor and comforting the sick. And, of course, there are the great social reformers and theologians of the Church – people like Mother Teresa and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Albert Schweitzer.

Yes, we often celebrate the faith of the saints, but we must also remember that not all of God's saints are well known and well loved.

As I've said before, I've known many saints in my life. Over the years, I've been taught and inspired and guided by many different people of faith – men and women who were filled with the wisdom of God – teachers and friends and authors – clergy and laity. And, in these coming weeks, I expect to see many more. These people give us hope – they remind us that the blessings of God are still here – waiting to be shared.

So, as we continue our pilgrimage of faith in these difficult days, I pray that we will continue to be guided by the example of the faith that feeds us – the faith that we see reflected back to us in the lives of the loving and the generous and the joyful and the hopeful. And, I pray that we will be inspired to grow in our hope and our conviction – I pray that we too will live and work alongside those who have gone before us with joy and wonder.

The Lord be with you