

Earlier in the week I ventured out into the back garden to take some kitchen waste down to the compost heap. There was a sharp frost and a thin covering of snow. Alongside the path there was the first daffodil coming into bloom.

It seemed to stand there as a promise of better things to come, a time when all the daffodils would be out, the blossom would be on the apple tree. Spring really would soon be here and the warmth of summer not long behind.

We are all in need of these signs of better times ahead. The programme on RTE on Tuesday night gave us a very clear picture of how the staff of the ICU unit in Tallaght University Hospital are dealing with the impact of Covid 19. In the darkness of that picture there was a light shining through – in the dedication and resilience of the staff at all levels, in the faces of the people who did recover and in the start of the vaccination programme of staff, of local nursing homes.

We need these signs of hope to take us through these coming weeks of continued restrictions that are necessary until the vaccination programme that is now starting begins to bear fruit. I think of leaving cert students worrying about their exams, their futures; young people struggling with the isolation from school, from friends, the experiences that all of us just took for granted when we were their age; businesses worrying about their future, employees worrying about the security of their jobs and with that their families, their homes.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Mark tells us of the experience of an inner group of Jesus' disciples as they witness his transfiguration on the mountain. This is one of those Gospel accounts that is quite foreign to our experience. I always find myself going back to the advice of one of my lecturers when he said the question to ask of ourselves as we read these accounts is, 'What experience of Jesus did the disciples or early Church have that they expressed in these terms?' As I read this passage, we have a picture here of the disciples being given a glimpse of the significance of Jesus, of this charismatic individual who had drawn them to him. In their initial encounters with Jesus they had seen a remarkable man, an engaging teacher. Here, in this vision on the mountain top, in the cloud, in the voice from heaven, there is a realisation that there is more to Jesus than the inspiring teacher, who called them, that he is indeed the Beloved Son. There is something in Peter that wants to stay in the moment, that wants to stay on the mountain top.

But they must come down from the mountain to return to 'real life', they must continue to follow Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, and with it the opposition, the rejection, the suffering and death. But they will carry with them the memory of Transfiguration, the realisation that, in the person of Jesus, God is doing something that no person, no power can ultimately frustrate; that he will triumph over death itself, that in that we will find our sure and certain hope.

I began talking of that solitary daffodil in my garden. It will no doubt fade before others come into bloom, before the apple tree blossoms. But it stands there now as a sign, a promise of blessing to come.

In the midst of the current crisis that is the Covid Pandemic, our society needs signs of hope, that there is an end, that the current restrictions will come to an end, that we will be able to meet, to share a meal.

To be signs of hope. Maybe that is our vocation, as members of the Church, as members of the Body of Christ – to be signs of hope in whatever situation God places us this week. To simply stand alongside those who are struggling at the minute – not with solutions but simply with our presence; to simply listen to those who are anxious for themselves or loved ones; to be a sign of hope in the face of anxiety and distress; to be a light in the midst of darkness; to put ourselves at his disposal, to simply bring something of Christ into the life of our neighbour.

I'll just close with the Covenant Prayer of the Methodist Church.

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.