

2020 EASTER SUNDAY

The average human person breathes about 650 million times during a lifetime. Breathing is more than a mechanism for oxygenating our blood. It is intrinsic to many of our most intense experiences. Good sleep is peaceful breathing. Enjoyable running is rhythmic breathing. Anger quickens our breathing, moments of astonishment take our breath away. Afflictions- like the present dreaded corona virus -strangle us of breath. To live fully is to breathe freely.

Breath is God's gift to us. At the time of the creation of the first man and woman: "The Lord God formed man and woman from the dust of the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and they became living beings." Breath symbolises Divinity's gift of life.

God became one of us when Jesus drew His first breath in the Stable of Bethlehem. His life ended on Calvary when, totally spent, Jesus bowed His head and, taking His last breath, 'handed over His spirit'.

Jesus lay dead within the tomb for three days. And then through the Power of the Father, the stone separating Jesus from the outside world was rolled away and Jesus was resurrected. Alive once again but with a resurrected body, Jesus would have looked out of the tomb and breathed in a deep breath as a sign that He was truly risen.

But at that fabulous moment, Jesus would not have breathed in Oxygen. His now was a different type of Body; a body no longer dependent on Oxygen or food. Rather He would have filled His lungs with the life-giving oxygen of God's breath. He breathed as God.

And so it was that later in the day when Jesus breathed on the apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"- He was not breathing Oxygen on them but God's life, God's power.

Finally there was the great outpouring of God's breath at Pentecost.

When we take our last breath, our spirits will reach down deep within our beings to bond with the Spirit of Christ, dwelling within us. And we- like the Resurrected Christ- will continue to live- but now in a new more glorious way for God will be breathing within us.

A Dominican priest, Fr. Paul Murray wrote the following poem for a friend who was dying:

Now as your spirit
fails, you can
with your last breath
breathe deep
and feel another's breath
inhaling and breathing
within your breath.

Hundreds and hundreds of people are dying of corona virus in countries which are very dear to us- the UK, USA, Spain, France and so many others. There is a lot of fear. All of us, I'm sure, have taken the lockdown seriously because we do not wish to place ourselves or others at risk of dying.

But we who believe in the Resurrection of Jesus are not terrorised of death. We are a people of hope. We know that we will not descend into nothingness after we have drawn our last breath. Christ's resurrection has given us a glorious hope that there life beyond death and that we, too, in God's good time, will receive resurrected bodies. How, we do not know. To breath in God's life, to live in God, is something we look forward to with great expectation.

As we experience a Holy Week so different from any we have ever experienced before, we do not allow ourselves to become frustrated or angry. We hold on to the sure knowledge of God's love for us.

And we pray for a new beginning once this time of lockdown is ended. In the words of our Bishops in their message for us today: "This Easter, with Jesus, we have been offered the opportunity to die to self and rise again to a new beginning. Our hope and prayer is that when we leave the tomb of our lockdown, we will work together as a community to build a better Church and society. May your rising from this Easter and our time of lockdown be marked by the peace and joy of the Risen Christ who walks with us on the various paths which make up our lives."

Could I invite you today to go outside into the sunshine. Lift your arms in praise and call out: "Christ is Risen. Is Risen indeed." Breathe in deeply. Feel the Breath of God entering your being. Feel yourselves alive with the Breath of the Risen Lord.

God's richest blessings upon you this Easter.

CHRIST IS RISEN. IS RISEN INDEED.