

2020 5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Tom was so tense- he just had to talk to someone- so he told his story to a complete stranger, an elderly man, sitting next to him on the train. Tom told the man that he had just been released from prison in Ohura where he had spent the last three years of his life for armed robbery. But he had undergone a change of heart and now wanted to come home and start life afresh.

He had wrought havoc at home as a teenager. Would his family want him home once again?

None of them had written to him during his time in prison- but they were not a letter-writing family. He was hoping against hope that they had forgiven him.

A week before his release he wrote to them and asked them to give him a sign if they would have him back.

Their house was close to the railway line just to the South of Hamilton. There was an apple tree in the back garden. If they would have him home he asked them to tie a large white ribbon on the apple tree. If they didn't want him home; they were to do nothing.

And if that was the case he would stay on the train and head on up to Auckland; though he had no idea where he would stay or what he would do.

As the train neared Hamilton the suspense became so acute that he was unable to look out of the window. So he asked the stranger to keep a look out for the apple tree. The elderly man gladly agreed to do so. After a while he touched Tom on the shoulder and said: "Son, take a look."

Tom looked- and there before his eyes stood the apple tree- covered with hundreds of large white ribbons.

Tears ran down Tom's face, washing away all the self-hatred that had poisoned his life. He was loved. He was coming home.

Home is where our parents are, our brothers and sisters, our spouse, our children, our Grandparents, our Grandchildren. It is a precious place. Here we can be ourselves- knowing that we are loved- not because we are successful or beautiful or handsome- but just for ourselves.

On the last night of His life, Jesus spoke to all who would embrace Him as their Lord and Saviour- the Way, the Truth and the Life: "A special place in My Father's House has been prepared for you and I will return to take you to it."

The welcome that Tom received from his Mum and Dad and his brothers and sisters on his return from prison was nothing in comparison to the welcome

we can expect from God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from Mary and from the angels and the saints when we enter heaven. The love we will receive in heaven will be the same unconditional, nurturing, love to be found in most families.

Cardinal Wiseman of England, who had spent many years as a youngster at Boarding School, famously said on his deathbed, "I am just as excited now as I used to be at the end of the School year, going home for my holidays."

Tom's family probably spent hours putting tens of metres of white ribbons on that tree to tell Tom that they loved him and that he was very welcome to return home.

How much greater will be the love awaiting us as we pass into the wondrous state of heaven. And all we have to do is what Tom did: open our hearts to receive the love of our Heavenly Family.

As we grow closer to death, I'm sure all of us will increasingly think of what is in store for us in eternity. I certainly am! On Monday I was 74. Heaven is close!

Today is Mother's Day- a day when we honour our mothers and try to show them special love. It is ever-so fitting that Mother's Day is in May- the month dedicated by the Church to our heavenly mother, Mary.

All families need a mother. Mothers are at the very heart of home-life. Who do you suspect masterminded the extravagant gesture to show Tom how deeply loved he still was? Our delight in being loved by our Mothers has been instilled into our inner most beings by our Creator God.

For heaven to be a true home, there surely must be the overshadowing presence of a mother. Families, homes, heaven, need a mother. And thus it is. God understands our need. Just before He died, Jesus said to the Apostle John- who represented all of us at the Foot of the Cross: "Son, behold your Mother." Mary was gifted to us by Jesus, the Son of God, as our Mother.

We have a mother who no matter how fickle we have been, will in the last days of our lives, make sure that we see the equivalent of an apple tree covered in white ribbons giving us a rich assurance that we have a beautiful home to come to. During our final days on Earth we will be given mighty graces enabling us to look forward with wondrous anticipation to the embrace of our God-whose very essence is love- and to the tender, gentle welcome of our Heavenly Mother.

Happy Mother's Day, dear Mother Mary!

Happy Mothers' Day to all of you who are Mothers!