

HOMILY – 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER – 15 APRIL 2018

John heard that his father was dying in hospital, in Edinburgh, he got the phone call when out on the rigs in the North Sea. The oil company flew him, by helicopter, to Aberdeen. He jumped in a hired car and drove down to the Royal Infirmary. His sister phoned on the mobile to say 'Dad is still with us. He's waiting for you'. John reached the Royal Infirmary four hours after the alarm was raised. He dashed into Intensive Care, entered the room and approaching the bed, took his father's hand in his hand, squeezed it gently, whispered in his ear, 'I love you Dad'. A minute later, Dad died.

I tell you this because of today's Gospel. The emergence of truth and the power of touch, touching the people we love. Let's put this in context. Jesus was crucified, his hands and feet nailed to a cross. Three days later, he rises from the dead. This extraordinary event, the most extraordinary in the history of the world, takes time for people to accept, realise what has truly happened. We have the benefit of 2,000 years of revelation history, they, in a sense didn't.

People, dare I say it, can be slow on the uptake, it can take time and real faith for the enormity of God's presence, to sink in. Through all the messiness and mixed messages about organized religion, it can be hard to get access to the grace of God at work. Humanity is hampered by doubt, guilt, cynicism and religious bias, prejudices and power struggles.

In the first reading from Acts, Simon Peter, a Jewish Christian, lambasts his own Jewish people. For disowning Christ and shouting to Pilate, 'Crucify Him', though Peter knew that Christ was destined to suffer and that much of what they did, was done in ignorance. There is no bitterness in Peter's proclamation, only a desire for the Jewish people to be reconciled with God, to be in touch with the truth.

It is that word, 'Touch' that is so important. Too be out of touch with someone we love breaks our hearts, conversely to feel their touch can mean everything to me, like John's dad feeling the touch of his son, just before he died.

Jesus touches us with the 'hand of God'. All through His ministry, He uses His hands to touch people and restore them to life. Like Jesus bringing Jairus's daughter back to life. 'Taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Talithi kumi" – little girl, get up!! (Mark 5).

Or again, in Mark 7, Jesus healing the deaf and dumb man, putting his fingers into the man's ears. Now Jesus invites us, The People of Faith, to touch him. In the Gospel today, He declares, "Touch Me and see for yourselves", "a ghost has no flesh and bones as you see I have". Jesus makes it very clear, in Luke's Gospel, that they be witnesses to His bodily resurrection and thereby, be in touch with the significance of this revelation, for the salvation of the world.

Therefore, and this is very important for us, the living Church, the true Church, baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, is called to be a 'Sacramental Church'. This means that through faith and the Holy Spirit, we remain in touch with God. Let me explain, when Jesus met with Doubting Thomas and showed him His wounds, He said "Give me your hand and put it into My side, touch and see for yourself". So, the apostolic life of the Church is about touching the world with the Hands of Christ. That we become God's hands and feet, according to how we live on earth. The power of the Sacraments are real, because they link us, through the Holy Spirit, with God. Baptism, Confession, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Marriage, Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick.

I will finish with a true story. A couple of years ago, I went to Livingston Centre, to do some shopping. While driving home, I get a very strong message to go to the hospital, St Johns, to visit Margaret Callander. I arrived at the Observation Ward to find her room filled with her family. She hadn't opened her eyes for hours. As soon as I anointed her and touched her with the Oil of Infirmorum, she opened her eyes, smiled briefly at her family and died. She was waiting to be touched by Christ in the anointing with Holy Oil. She was now prepared for the journey to God's Kingdom. The anxiety and delay, was over, she was reconciled with God.

So, keep in touch. Keep in touch with your faith. Keep in touch with your family. Keep in touch with your salvation, through the Hands of Christ.

Amen