



SPIRITUAL REFLECTION – FR ALAN ROBERTS

APRIL 2022

THE RESURRECTION AND LONELINESS -

I had been asked to write this month's article on loneliness, but because its' appearance would coincide with Easter it seemed best that the loneliness article appear later. However, after a lot of thought it occurred to me, 'no, put them together!'

After all, did not the Earthly Jesus exercise his ministry for the most part with the poor? And doesn't the Risen Jesus still continue his ministry through us? And is it not true that loneliness is a part of the journey of faith, which potentially can bring us to know what Thomas Merton terms: *'The invisible companionship of God'*, the grace which in more modern times drove people like St Teresa of Calcutta, Dorothy Day and Catherine de Hueck Doherty to commit to the poor and to seek social change. Through my love for the Risen Jesus, I will learn to live with a healthy unease so that I might become an instrument in restoring a just social and economic system to society. So there you have it.

Loneliness is a subject described as a pandemic in society. It is not the exclusive property of the person in the picture below.



When it strikes you want to go and hide in some corner. Self-pity carries you and you feel you are on a ship in a storm about to be violently tossed into the ocean below. But in the depths of every heart there is a garden calling out to the very depths of your being. This garden is Gethsemane. Jesus stood there and felt the pain of loneliness. He was sustained by the angels but who were they I wonder? Mother Teresa states: "There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love".

As a believer in Jesus and His Risen state, it is impossible to proclaim my love for God without recognising the dignity of each human being. If I genuinely love this Risen Lord, I will be sent to the oppressed and they may well be people oppressed through loneliness and who live close by.

For me, the picture above is one of the more drastic cases in New Zealand and could have been taken in Ponsonby Road or Queen St in Auckland but it is one I do see sometimes in the small town where I live. I suggest you become that person for a moment and try to figure out how you got there. Pope Francis suggests we take time to talk with those who live on the streets and maybe discover their story.

Loneliness has many causes but one you are likely to meet is when a person is suddenly thrust into a very new situation. A sudden death and after years of marriage the everyday familiar is no longer there. The widow/er now has to go to functions alone, or make decisions the other spouse always made. The stress of all this can lead to agoraphobia (fear of going somewhere), unhealthy eating, impatience or intolerance, excessive concern about health, and a decision not to bother engaging with others.

Another finds themselves suddenly in a rest home. A recent example for me was of someone always out and about, and then, after a fall reluctantly agreed to try it, only to find she loved it. So some cope well but many do not, at least not at first. Being a good listener to a simple question like ‘what do you miss the most?’ can be a useful exercise. You can’t solve the situation but the reassurance of your presence will be your gift as well as helping where you can.

I think you can judge a person to be well if they have a sense of gratitude for what has been. This won’t spare them the pain of living in a new situation, but it will help them surrender and find peace. But if they are complaining, anxious and not great company, it may be that they are just lonely, very lonely. Every person has a story. A well-chosen question may bring out their story and give you the empathy you need to support another through their loneliness. So for your reflection and discussion ask yourself what would it be like for someone who

- Loses their spouse
- Is obliged to enter a rest home
- Discovers they are losing their sight
- Is obliged to surrender their driver’s licence due to age or ill health
- Learns their spouse is terminally ill
- Is obliged to ask for help – food, school fees? medical expenses
- Has literally nowhere to live?

In your discussion on this subject, look at your own experience of traumatic times. What were you craving most?

Dear Lord
You lived on the streets and I chatted with you
You lived alone and I visited you often
You protested in the housing crisis, so I joined you
You needed a light bulb changed so I did it

You were angry and unreasonable so I listened
You had no one to take you shopping so I picked you up each week
Your bills were mounting and I paid them
You were so alone that I visited twice a week
So now, can I come in?

April Prayer Intention: Please pray for this intention each day throughout the month

We pray as Vincentians for the openness to visit the lonely, the patience to spend time with them and the perseverance to serve their needs