



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: Ubi Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

20th May 2020

The Revd Canon Dwight dela Torre

The UBI CARITAS is an ancient chant used by the church as early as the 8th Century. It was used on Maundy Thursday during the ritual washing of the feet. But now, it has come to be used on other occasions.

Ubi Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

Where love and loving kindness are, there is God.

This chant has always inspired me in my ministry. I only wanted to be a simple parish priest. Now I am a chaplain to the Filipinos in Hong Kong, most of whom are foreign domestic workers.

As their Chaplain, I share their pains and sorrows, joys and victories. To be chaplain, is, to be, there.

I thank God St John's is reaching out to them.

The Cathedral's ministry alongside foreign domestic workers, gives hope and touch the lives of thousands of foreign domestic workers who otherwise would have suffered indignities and injustices, alone and in silence.

St John's Cathedral is indeed a place of God's grace, welcoming all, following Christ and changing lives in the heart of Hong Kong.

Now we are in the midst of a pandemic. Public religious services have been suspended for months now. Wearing mask is encouraged; as well as frequent hand washing. For health's sake, people are told to observe social distancing. But social distancing need not mean social separation. Social distancing need not mean social isolation.

In response to this situation, the Cathedral explored other means to reach out to people. In the process, the Cathedral found and tapped young people with the skills and the time much needed for our webcast services. As a result we reached others who did not normally come to St John's. Furthermore, former members of the Cathedral Community who are now in other parts of the world are able to connect and worship with us once again. Webcast worship has become a new mission tool.

But since we are a sacramental and liturgical church, and for us the Eucharist is the central act of Christian worship, we long for the resumption of public religious services in church to receive Communion; and to meet our friends. In other words, to be in personal community once again.

Meanwhile there are lingering questions people ask. "Is this pandemic by the hand of God?" The Bible does not give us one single answer.

The prophets believe that diseases, famines and defeat in wars are God's instruments to punish his people; and they call for repentance. That is why, disasters and calamities like this, almost always force people to beg for God's mercy and intervention.

But there are other several Biblical perspectives. Other biblical writers think that there is something good, if we can call them that, behind suffering. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he says, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." (Gen 45:4-5)

In the footnote of the text in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, it says: "God graciously contrives to bring good out of evil."

Some people are saying, the skies over the industrial areas have cleared during the lockdown; and even the ozone layer has healed itself. In other words, redemptive suffering.

The ultimate and perfect example of course of redemptive suffering and death, is that of Jesus.

Then there are those who think that suffering is a test from God. This is obvious in the Book of Job. When everything he had were taken away from him: his vast wealth and even his children,

Job's response was, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

These are not the only answers to the question. There are more.

The other question is, "Where is God in this situation?" The Bible teaches us that we are all created in the image of God. This means whatever we are, whoever we are, wherever we are, we bear the image of God. Therefore God is there, in everyone trying one's very best to alleviate the sufferings of others.

I'd like to repeat that: God is there, in everyone trying one's very best to alleviate the sufferings of others.

Ubi Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

Where love and loving kindness are, there is God.

God bless you all. Amen.