



The Song of Love
A Pastoral Letter to all the Faithful
For Holy Week 2020

I am already feeling disappointed that the lockdown means that celebrations of Easter, the Queen of Feasts, will be muted this week. Just when I would be preparing for the moving ceremonies of the Chrism Eucharist and Easter Vigil, not to mention Good Friday, I am conscious of the need to minister to a scattered family, where the future is more unclear than ever before. At the same time, I am given a huge privilege and opportunity, with the help of colleagues, to speak to all of you through the recording of liturgies (see <https://dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/coronavirus/digital-prayer-and-worship/worship-from-esgobty/>), so that services will be available for the Triduum – the three great days of the liturgy of the Passion) and also through this pastoral letter, with the opportunity to proclaim the Good News of our Salvation in Jesus Christ.

One of my very favourite hymns is “My Song is Love Unknown” by Samuel Crossman, written in 1664:

My song is Love unknown,
My Saviour’s Love to me,
Love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be,
O, who am I, that for my sake,
My Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

It might be said that these coming three days teach us all we need to know about Love. Tomorrow is Maundy Thursday, when we remember the “Mandatum”, the command of Jesus: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” He demonstrated that love symbolically by washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. He, who was Rabbi and Master, attended to the most basic needs of the disciples in caring for their tiredness, dustiness, and weariness. It is **the nature of Love** to care for the needs of the beloved. Love is more than emotion, it is an act of will, an act which “cherishes”.

On God’s Friday we see **the cost of love** – God gives himself up entirely for the pain and sin of the world. There are versions of the Christian faith that somehow manage to make God look sadistic – a vengeful father determined to inflict pain on someone, anyone so that the price of sin might be paid – but let us remember that in the Christian faith it is God himself incarnate in Christ who is crucified: God takes on to himself the pain, the hurt, the cost of sin. It doesn’t matter how intolerable the burden of the brokenness of the world is, God takes it on his own shoulders. “He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his own head on the cross.” (*Colossians 2.13-15, Philip’s Translation*)

On Easter Eve, running into Easter Day, we see **the prize of Love**, which is new Life. “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*1 Corinthians 15.57*) It is impossible for darkness, sin, death and evil to hold God down, and Christ is raised from death, the firstborn

of many children (*Romans 8.29*), for his love is shown to us “that we might lovely be.” God’s love recreates the universe, and we are invited to the party at the end of time.

To be a Christian is to plant ourselves firmly under the banner of Love: to accept what God’s love has done for us in Christ, and to become channels of that love in the world. We are called to love extravagantly because God loved us. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (*1 John 4.10*) “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” (*1 John 4.7*)

We may not be able to meet together publicly and physically in the coming days, but I urge you to make the journey of love alongside one another spiritually – to know that, as you make that journey, the Teulu Asaph makes that journey with you in the same way and at the same time. As we reflect on Jesus’ readiness to lay aside his robes, and gird himself as a slave to wash the feet of his disciples, let us commit to serve the Servant King. As we find a way to explore the desolation of the Cross, let us resolve, in the face of fear or of difficulty, to spend and to be spent in the name of God’s love for the world. In the darkness turned to light which is Easter, let us rise to new life and commitment as followers of the Lord. And let us know that we can do these things because he gives us such grace that this might be so: “For I am sure that he that began this good work in you will bring it to completion.” (*Philippians 1.6*)

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The woman behind the counter of the shop said to me the other week (I haven’t been out much more recently): “What can I do for you, my lovely?” She said it so casually, and yet I am God’s lovely, and you are God’s lovely, and we are God’s lovely, not because of our own loveliness, which may be rather elusive, but because in Christ, our identity is a sure inheritance. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (*Romans 8.32*)

With every blessing for the Triduum and Easter,

+gregory/melny