

Talk for Sunday 17th May 2020

Today the 6th Sunday of Easter we hear in our first reading from Acts 17 that God is the creator and designer of everything, ever present and working in the world.

In our gospel reading Jesus tells His disciples that He is in the Father and they are in Him and He will be with them in all they do. How does this inspire and encourage us today in our time and in this situation.

The World Health Organisation (known as the WHO) has designated 2020 as the year of the Nurse and Midwife. This was because since 2016 three separate studies revealed that if we want to see universal access to good healthcare then we need to invest in training and recruiting more nurses and midwives, the studies concluded that this would improve community health, economic development and the empowerment of women and girls. Not only that but we should lobby for more nurses and midwives to have a voice in national and international policymaking.

The year of the Nurse and Midwife is the culmination of this campaign and shows that the WHO has recognised that it cannot promote the health and wellbeing of nations and local communities without frontline nurses and midwives. They make up 50 percent of the global workforce and regularly work in settings where there is limited or no access to doctors, hospitals or pharmacies.

In the UK alone there are as many as 40,000 unfilled nursing vacancies and 3,500 unfilled midwifery posts.

So why is the WHO focusing on 2020 as the year of the nurse and midwife? Well I am sure we have all heard of Florence Nightingale who was born in Florence, Italy on May 12th 1820, two hundred years ago, she was baptised in the Christian faith and grew up with a strong conviction to do good. Florence inspired by her faith, felt that she had a calling from God to put prayer into action. She said "it's no use praying for deliverance from pestilence and disease, if we do nothing about the squalor that is causing it" Against all odds Florence fought to become a nurse, and social reformer, and would go on to shape healthcare around the world for the next two centuries.

She took a group of nurses, whom she had trained, to the Scutari barracks in Turkey to care for the injured British soldiers from the Crimean War. The care that they were to give was in some ways back to basics, to clean up the squalor, and to introduce good sanitation, cleanliness and most importantly hand washing.

Florence shaped by her faith and the Crimean war set about lobbying for reform and changes to sanitation in English hospitals and communities, and modern day nursing was born.

Our hospitals today continue to build on Florence's knowledge of the spread of disease by establishing and maintaining high standards of practice to minimise the spread of infection.

Twenty-first century nursing is a highly technical and skilled profession, with many nurses and midwives now performing tasks such as minor surgery, caesarean sections and anaesthetics. Ninety percent of all patient contact worldwide is with nurses. Yet still nurses do not have a seat at the

table when it comes to decision making. In some countries nurses are still regarded as handmaid to doctors.

At its heart though nursing and midwifery have their roots in an ancient Christian tradition of care and compassion for the sick, marginalised and forgotten. This year more than ever we need to wake up all governments to train more nurses and midwives and improve their working conditions.

Florence was known as “The Lady with the Lamp” as the soldiers recognised that her actions of care and compassion were born out of dedication and love. Florence saw this as her duty and her vocation.

It seems to me that in times of need God equips a person or persons to rise to the surface and to change His world.

We live in a world which increasingly expects perfection. We measure ourselves against images we see around us and put ourselves down. We can feel pressure to be perfect and feel that what we are doing is never good enough. This is stressful and we can soon feel exhausted.

Our society called health professionals heroes, like our nurses on the frontline today. The nurses will say, we are just doing our job. Christian nurses might say that faith in God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit enables us to do his work.

In our Gospel reading today Jesus is equipping his disciples with the Holy Spirit to go out, not as heroes but to do the job he has given them. “If you love me, show it by doing what I’ve told you”. Jesus knew that the disciples would need help, a companion, so Jesus says “I will talk to the Father and he will provide you with another Friend” Jesus promises His Holy Spirit will be with them, although physically they will be apart, He will never have left them. This reality so inspired the disciples that they went on to change the world. They could only have done so through the one who sent them and continues to equip us today.

The first disciples met together in each other’s homes, they didn’t have a building and although we love our church building, it’s like going back to basics; we are being equipped to continue to spread the message of God’s love from our homes. Our worship through website and YouTube can reach those beyond our parish boundaries. I would call that God as creator and designer.

Everyone is called to be a disciple, they are the ones giving pastoral care, keeping in touch and serving their neighbour in any way they can. In it together but apart, except in spirit.

May each of us be filled and refreshed by the Holy Spirit today.

Amen