

The Catholic Church here in Europe is changing out of all recognition. People no longer look up to the Church as an authentic teacher of morality and right living. Does anybody these days take any notice of what the Church says about gender, sexuality and marriage?

And is there still an automatic respect for priests and clergy?

Patterns of Sunday Mass attendance are changing. The way we celebrate the Sacrament of Confession is changing.

Meanwhile churches are closed, parishes are grouped together and Masses are cut. And yet, there are people here today who want to become full members of the Catholic Church, who wish to share in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

Are they deluding themselves?

Do they know what they are letting themselves in for?

Or....have they seen something we haven't seen?

Isaiah says today *"No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it?"* Never mind the glories of our Catholic past, we must concentrate on what God is doing now. We must accept the realities of the world as it is. Our contemporary world may well seem like a wilderness but it is precisely in this wilderness that God is making his road, in these wilds that God is making his paths.

What is this road? What is this path? This road, this path is none other than Jesus Christ himself. St Paul says, *"For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him."* This is the message of Pope Francis. Focus on what really matters. Focus on the fundamentals. Focus on God's mercy and love. Know Christ himself and *the power of his resurrection*. Everything else is so much rubbish.

Karl Rahner, one of the great Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century said that Catholicism will only survive if it becomes a mystical way, a spiritual way. We can no longer rely on the infrastructure of our religion, on our own schools, on our hierarchies, or of having some privileged position in our society. All we can rely on is Jesus Himself, the spiritual journey, the way of the heart, the way through the wilderness.

Pray for those preparing to be confirmed. Pray for one another. Use these next two weeks leading up to Easter as a kind of retreat within life. Turn off the TV and the computer when you can. Travel within. Travel with Jesus. Find space to listen. Find space to be the person God created you to be. *Race for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus.*

This is where the Church of the future will be born. This is where Catholicism will find renewal. This is how we can change the world.

Fr Michael

