

## Dear Friends,

September already! This year has been overtaken by the events of the pandemic and it is still a source of great concern. I'm glad that some of the restrictions have been eased and that we can enjoy something of a return to a semblance of normality but we all need to be aware that it's still 'out there' and we need always to be vigilant.

I don't get angry very easily but sometimes, something triggers a spark of anger in me that can become all-consuming and is usually fired by a sense of righteous indignation. The other week, I had cause to travel to London by train; a few days ago, I enjoyed a day trip to France from Dover, on the ferry. Both experiences should have been enjoyable but for the fact that there was such a blatant disregard for the need for face masks. On the train, less than half the people were wearing them and, on the ferry, even fewer. To add to this, there were no announcements on the Tannoy advising their use. Some seemed to think that wearing it around the neck, like a necklace was sufficient whilst others thought that merely by holding it, it would be enough. On the ferry, as though to add insult to injury, every hand sanitiser unit was empty and when I pointed this out to the Purser, he just shrugged his shoulders. (The ferry was a DFDS Line – one to avoid, I think!) A friend in Scotland said that in one railway carriage on 'Scot rail', 24 people were without any masks at all... and every one of them under 30! This is a global pandemic. When will arrogance and bravado be replaced by common sense and respect for others? This is all about protecting yourself in confined spaces and protecting others from the potential of passing the virus to others. It's going to be a long time before this evil passes and the sooner we realise it, the better.

I've always been a believer in good old 'common sense' which, I know, can carry us through so many situations. I don't believe a heavy handed approach to anything; we need to assess any and every situation and handle as is best for us and for others. We seem so focussed on our rights and never on our responsibilities these days, and yet the two go hand in hand. Common sense and its approach to our human situation will always 'win the day.'

In the Old Testament, in the Book of Numbers (Ch21 v.4-9) The Hebrew people were on a journey to their own land passing through the wilderness. The wilderness was a physical place but also an emotional and spiritual desert where all known values were being turned upside down. The people were getting low on patience and very angry with both God and Moses. They accused them of bringing them out of Egypt to 'this place' where there was little bread and water and the food was unsatisfying. Here it was, that they were attacked by a plague of snakes which killed many with their bite and started to bring them to their senses. They realised their need of God and their reliance on Moses, their leader. Healing was eventually found in the raising on a standard of a bronze serpent which Moses had made and those who had been bitten, raised their eyes to the bronze serpent and were made whole again.

First of all, they needed to face their demons (in the form of the bronze serpent) and assess the awfulness of their situation. Secondly, they needed to realise that although it

sometimes didn't feel like it, there were in fact, being helped and thirdly, they needed to get on with their lives having due regard for others and understanding more fully what true community meant. I leave you to ponder on its relevance to our present plague but urge you all to lift your eyes heavenward to find wholeness.

Keep safe and please, wear your mask when appropriate and encourage others to do the same.

Yours sincerely,

Fr Keith