

Do I believe that the corona virus is God's punishment on a godless world? I have heard priests and preachers say – especially online – that it is. Shame on them. I could not believe that for one moment. Who would want to know such a God? We don't need to look to God to punish us – we do that well enough ourselves.

We should never forget that because we can say nothing about God, whatever we do try to say comes out of the texture and shape our own hearts. It says nothing about him and everything about us.

Bearing this in mind, what can we say about today's gospel reading? We're all familiar with it – it is the raising of Lazarus. What does that mean for us, within ourselves, as a symbol? What does it mean when we internalise that gospel passage? And especially in these present times?

First and foremost it means that life is always a matter of dying and being born. This was the entire meaning of the life of Jesus: death and resurrection. New life from the old. But it happens every moment of our daily lives – or it should do. Every opportunity to grow rather than to shrivel, to give love and not just expect it, to love others as well as we love ourselves – these are all moments of resurrection, of new life.

Lazarus is a symbol of this. Life is full, every day, of potential 'Lazarus moments'.

What we must slowly begin learning in this crisis is how to die to conflict and be born into co-operation; to die to alienation and be born into a sense of human solidarity; to die to contempt for the earth and be born into care for it. These are momentous Lazarus lessons and we can see them happening all over the world.

Sooner or later the present terribly difficult circumstances will come to an end – because nothing in this world endure forever. But only by understanding the lessons they have to teach us will we be able to give some kind of meaning to all this sickness and death. Otherwise it is incomprehensible.

God can help us to learn these lessons, but he has not caused them – to suggest otherwise is to say that he is filling his children with fear. This is impossible because God is love – not just loving, not just full of love, not just the source of love but love itself – and the opposite of love is fear: not hate, but fear. Fear can never come from God. The phrase most often on Jesus' lips was: "Do not be afraid."

The prophet Isaiah puts it beautifully:

“Even though the mountains may be shaken and fall, or the hills crumble to dust, my love for you will never fail and my peace will never leave you. For the Lord has compassion for you.” (Is 54:10)