**Saturday Lent Week Four**

A good friend may give you consolation and a comforting word when you feel desperate, but a true friend will never give false hope. Politicians who want to get re-elected, parents who just want to be liked, employers who want to avoid confrontation may decide to deceive those who look to them for leadership by throwing them scraps of illusion. It’s like throwing something you don’t want to a cat who looks excited but after it has sniffed it turns up its nose and looks at you with disgust.

Simone Weil never minced words and so many find her insight too concentrated a form. She once said, ‘all consolation is deception’. I think she meant false consolation and false hope all of which come from the ‘father of lies’ not the ground of being.

‘The virus is fake news; we’ll be back to normal by Easter. Business will boom again very soon.’

‘Of course, meditation doesn’t need discipline. Do it when you feel like it.

‘It was all their fault, obviously. Blame them.’

‘You don’t need to suffer. Live as if you’ll never die’.

In one form or another, from legislators, pulpits or lifestyle gurus we swallow lies all the time. After a while, we need bigger lies. When false hopes aren’t realised, we need more outrageous ones to make us believe them. But as the stakes get higher the stronger becomes the addiction and the denial of reality. I’m not saying we should be grateful for the virus or for suffering in general but we should acknowledge that it can teach us to see reality more clearly and change patterns of self-deception that allow others unscrupulously to deceive us.

The Desert Fathers understood *acedia* as one of the major blocks to human development. It means discouragement leading to negativity and cynicism, the rejection of anything that doesn’t give us what we want. It denies that we have to pass through tunnels before coming out into the light. It distorts our perception of truth and tells lies we want to hear because we have heard them so many times before. They have only the virtue of being familiar, having been replayed from our internal archives perhaps for decades. Acedia is not our fault.

If people feel this while in isolation during the great shutdown, they don’t have to blame themselves. It’s the same with boredom. You can’t help being bored. But we can do something about these unhappy states of mind. We can recognise them and try another remedy from those we have used before. Stillness rather than activity. Silence rather than raising the volume, Simplicity rather than looking for something new. The collective terms for this alternative approach to living is contemplation. The contemplative path may look like a narrow one compared with what we were doing before. But once tried, we find it ‘leads to life’.