

## **Letter to Confirmation Candidates – Holy Saturday 2020**

My dear young friends,

This is the evening on which you were due to make a formal application to be confirmed this year having spent some time in reflection on your own and in your groups. Sadly, as we now know this event cannot happen at the moment. I was looking forward to it as indeed I had been looking forward to meeting you in groups and discerning together where Our Lord is leading you in your life today and in the future. The event may be postponed but the process of discernment certainly isn't. As you know we have tried to think what it is to 'choose to be chosen', and this thought is what we, your leaders, were wanting to develop with you. That is the reason we have sent you the work you would have been doing in your groups so far and asked you to think carefully about your own life with Our Lord and his choice of you to be his followers, friends and disciples in the modern world.

None of this process is about making you do anything or imposing our faith on you. That would be discourteous and disastrous. Of course we were all young once, and the path to maturity now, in one respect, is no different than it was for us, in some cases very many years ago – trying to find out who we are, developing and understanding relationships, becoming moody and inward-looking, concerned about our 'image' and how others see us, worrying about exams, the prospect of jobs, careers and a future – but the context now is entirely different. The development of technology, the incessant lure of consumerism, and the advent of social media have brought new challenges to you that people like me and my generation could never have known. Added to this, the uncertainty of a future career, the prospect of not finding a way and a life for ourselves and the increasing amount of mental illness, anxiety and depression, which can often lead to tragic outcomes, mean that being young now is not easy. There will be those who say that you 'have it too easy' now and the way that they didn't, because you cannot know the deprivation that they had and some of the hardships they endured. However, this does not mean to say that a young person nowadays is not 'deprived' or does not know 'hardship'. Nothing could be further from the truth. To be a young person today is often a very lonely life, filled with 'virtual' friendships and acquaintances and the continual fantasy of 'celebrity' and fame that is held out to you like a carrot to attract your attention and commitment. In a beautiful comment in his new book, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, the well-known Dominican preacher says of young people: "we can't wade in and tell them what to do, but we can accompany them as they discover who they are, because identity is not chosen, it is discovered. We must also have confidence in the young so that they can prepare for a future we cannot imagine and live Christian lives in a world we do not understand."

No one is going to tell you what to do – that is counter-productive and would only meet with resentment and opposition – and we certainly won't. It is our place to gently lead you and guide you, to help you not make too many of the mistakes that we made and still do, and to excite you to the calling our Saviour places before you – to find your life by losing it, and to create in so doing the Servant Church, which Jesus wants and is yet to be. This of course runs counter to many of the messages you are receiving from different sources every

day. They tell you to think of yourself first – “because you’re worth it” – to value your own ambition and opinion before that of anyone else and to live in your own bubble of ‘fake news’ and insincerity, which is not a good place to be. At this present moment, we are in the grip of the most devastating global problem we may ever have faced, and we seem to be able to do nothing about it. This frightens us all and leads us to wonder if and when it may come to an end and if so, will it ever come back. The fact is we are not in control of our destiny after all and this is something which countless people are not willing to accept. People have necessarily become isolated from each other and this is a painful and fearful experience. They worry if they will become ill themselves and may even die as so many have done, without seeing their parents, children or grandchildren ever again. But many good things have emerged from this dangerous situation. There is still so much goodwill among people who are now acquainting themselves with their neighbours whom they have lived near to but never spoken to before. These strangers have now become friends to be helped when they cannot get out to do things for themselves. Before we were all too preoccupied with ourselves to notice; now we begin to see and the realisation is joyful. It may be, when you are bored with the delights of Wi-Fi, that you come to see for yourselves what lovely parents (even brothers and sisters!) you actually have, and how much they mean to you, especially if your parents are one of the so-called ‘frontline people’ putting themselves at risk each day for the care of those who are sick and elderly because of this crisis. Don’t forget to give them a hug frequently and tell them you love them. That will give them the will and strength to persevere through what might be very difficult days and months ahead.

Finally, this situation is certainly making us all look differently at our world as well as each other. What sort of world do we want to grow up in? A kinder, more compassionate and safe world for sure. This is why the effort to promote climate change is so important and thank God it is being spearheaded by a young lady – Greta Thunberg. Another young person, Malala Yousafzai, has prophetically drawn our attention to the plight of people who are forced to leave their homes because of war and violence. These are the people and there are many others for you and all of us to look up to and admire but, more importantly, to imitate. They are the ones who have discovered what is really important for us and vital for our future and have not become lost or obsessed with illusory fantasies or ambitions. This is what God is choosing you to do and be – I am certain of it – and far from being dull and boring, it is truly exciting and joyful. We accept his calling within the family of the Church, the community of believers which we know, is not all it should be and which so often, I am ashamed to say, has let children and young people down. But it is the Lord’s Church and will be his Servant Church, if we want it to and make it so through our faith, cheerful self-giving and determination. On this Easter weekend, when we are celebrating new life while right in the midst of sadness, anxiety and death, I want to encourage you to pray that prayer of St. John Henry Newman for yourselves, to ask our risen Lord to help you discover what your ‘mission which he has given to no other’ really is and to have the courage to embrace it for the glory of his name and the future of our world together.

A Blessed and Happy Easter to you all.

With love from Father Frank