Pastoral Letter from Father Keith  
March 26th 2020  

My dear brothers and sisters,  
Peace be with you.  

I am writing this on a beautiful spring morning- the door of my study is open, a light breeze is gently shaking blossom from the trees; the warm sunshine is bringing a richer palette of colours to our garden, and its warmth is awaking birdsong; all seems calm. It evokes for me some of my favourite verses in scripture:

10 My beloved speaks and says to me:  
‘Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away;  

11 for now the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone.  

12 The flowers appear on the earth;  
the time of singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtle-dove  
is heard in our land.  

13 The fig tree puts forth its figs,  
and the vines are in blossom;  
they give forth fragrance.  

Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away.  

(The Song of Songs 2: 10-13)  

I recall that, some years ago, I was asked to give a talk to a secular group of women (not sure why they asked me); I began by reading the above words- and a few additional verses- from a printed sheet. I asked them if they knew where they came from. Guesses were made, various poets suggested as possible authors, but it was only after giving a few clues (my collar, cassock, apparently being insufficient pointers) that one of them put up a tentative hand and said, “Are they from the Bible?” I was amused, but also saddened. It seemed that they had not expected to find within the pages of scripture such tender and beautiful
language. Had I stood up and read the Ten Commandments, doubtless there would not have been the same hesitancy.
The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) is a dialogue between a bride and a bridegroom. It is full of passionate yearning, of delight in love and the natural world. Such is its sensual (even erotic) imagery, that the early Church was unsure about its inclusion in the canon of scripture! The argument and insight that held sway was the recognition that this gorgeous poem reveals its deepest meaning as a symbol of the love of God for his Church- the Bridegroom and His Bride. Remember, my friends that Jesus refers to himself as the Bridegroom.
In these times of pandemic, when we might be tempted (I use the word deliberately) to see the beauty of the world and truth of the gospel as somehow deceptive, it is good to be reminded that in Christ, these dimensions of human experience are fully embraced. There is no denial of pain and anguish and uncertainty. They are met head on, and out of them springs hitherto unimagined new life- indeed, eternal life. In teaching his friends about a coming cataclysmic devastation – the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which must have seemed like the end of the world- Jesus offered these words:

“Then he told them a parable: ’Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. “ Luke 21: 29-31
We can take courage and confidence from these words, in the face of all that is coming.
The Bridegroom will not abandon his Bride.
The blossom is upon the bough.
Summer is not far away.

With blessings and prayers,
Fr Keith
PS Don’t forget our weekly live stream on Facebook Live: 6pm Tuesday; 10am Thursday, 10am Sunday