Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am writing this in Holy Week. The dust stirred up by the hosanna crying multitudes in Jerusalem has settled, and we are moving onwards, continuing a journey which is, to many of us, very familiar, and which we know will take us to Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the empty tomb. But suppose that you were making that journey for the first time: imagine for a moment how shockingly disorienting it would have been. The journey you might have mapped out as a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth would have surely taken you to the most exalted places (‘Yes, yes...I know he said those who would exalt themselves would be humbled...yes, yes; but he didn’t mean me- I’m his friend- he chose me’). True enough, the week began well, with the aforementioned crowd hailing the master as Son of David, the long-awaited Messiah, come to claim the great victory of God over the forces of darkness, represented by Imperial Rome. The journey you had plotted (to use an ambiguous word) in your imagination might have dizzied you with the expectation of new power and status; you can see yourself walking streets where pagan soldiers no longer tread; Herod’s venomous spider web of spies has gone, and you can draw in lungful upon lungful of the heady air of freedom! You can hold your head high! But, instead, the reality is that, numb with shock and fear, you are slinking rat like through filthy backstreets, avoiding the accusatory light of torches and lamps, exposing you to the suspicious eyes of hostile people who might denounce you as his friend...Your face is hidden in the folds of your headdress; and your head is bowed, not proudly raised. Jesus is dead. Crucified. It is all over. You expected joy and a great triumph- you are overcome with fear and broken by defeat.

What of us? Perhaps our journey in Passiontide and Holy Week had become too familiar- somewhat akin to making an annual trip to a regular holiday destination: the familiar ritual of booking and buying, packing a suitcase, getting the right currency, driving to the airport, going through baggage checks and passport control, a moderately uncomfortable flight - but not too testing - before we arrive at the place of reassuring welcome, and even beauty. But this year the
journey feels a bit different, does it not? We are in a less familiar place. On our streets we are required to be distant from each other; our ordinary freedoms are less than they were; we cannot enter our beloved our places of worship; we are physically separated from our family and friends. Of course, there is not for us - by any measure - the same level of threat as there was for the first disciples (and as there is today for many Christians in other parts of the world) but to worship is, for many, at least a shade or two harder. A greater effort, an increased attentiveness, may be required of us, if we are to stay with Jesus in these days. It is just possible, however, that in this strange season we might feel a greater affinity with those first fearful followers of the Lord. I would like to suggest that we are perhaps being called to experience this holy season in a different way, and, by so doing, to encounter the Lord anew (many of you have expressed to me that you have felt this). One thing is sure; no matter how disoriented we might be, and how strange the journey is, the tomb will be empty on Easter day; we shall enter and see the grave clothes folded; and, with the bewildered apostles, we shall emerge blinking into the light; we shall see the terrible grief of Mary Magdalene turn to an ecstasy of belief, and hear her cry, "I have seen the Lord!" And, we too, shall see Him risen! So, let us give thanks that, though we have necessarily walked a different way, and though we cannot know when we shall return to our more familiar path, we trust that the living Lord is always in step with us.

Let us anticipate the Easter proclamation: Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

With blessing and prayers,
Fr Keith