



FATHER STEPHEN ORTIGER'S GRANDPARENTS' TALK

MARCH 2021

Strengthening, supporting and guiding us during testing times.

Father Stephen began the talk with the statement that two key words are *tribulation* and *poise*.

"These certainly are times of tribulation for everyone, however here in Britain we may not be as used to challenging situations like this unlike in many other countries around the world which suffer earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis. Not that the lack of it makes it any easier to bear, but the unknown holds its own terrors. This unknown enemy is also unseen, it is invidious and everywhere, no one knows where it will strike or whom it will profoundly affect.

Satan is often compared to a serpent; it slithers in unseen and attacks. If he was an elephant, we might see him coming and prepare. This enemy is a bit like carbon monoxide, unseen and deadly. If the challenge is blatant, it is easier to deal with rather than the subtle challenge. In *Jaws* [the film] you do not see the shark in the opening scene, but you know he is there... it's scary, particularly with the theme music. When he is on the surface and blatant, it's easier to deal with.

Jesus never said **if** bad things happen but **when**, that's why he told us to build our houses on rock so that they would withstand the difficult moments. This is one of life's difficult moments and we need to dig deep into our reserves to support each other. [Fr Stephen called this our *poise*.]

We can't see the enemy (Covid-19) which heightens our anxiety. It 'creeps in underneath the ramparts'. We are cut off, cooped up, pinned down. This is the time to keep our poise, keeping balance in the middle of what is happening. The transmitters of poise set a life-giving example. The rookie sailor is calmed and encouraged by seeing the 'old salt' in the crew.

What does this do to us mentally? When castles were besieged, despite fortifications and stores, many occupants didn't last long... the mental onslaught did the damage and the

temptation to make a deal. Within the castle, if we knew we had others fighting alongside us, it became easier to cope. They lit fires to communicate with each other, a beacon calling for help. Another point worth noting was that in a castle siege the main resources had to be on the inside. You needed a well within the walls if you were being besieged. In the castles, water was essential. Humans can exist without food for 6 weeks, 5 days without water. The source of water, the well, needs to be within like our source of strength.

[Fr Stephen spoke about the importance of being 'real'... to name our feelings: fearful, bored, depressed. To reach out to others for help, to name our fears. This IS a time of tribulation; it IS difficult and it is ok to say so.]

Christ comes in our neighbour and from inside ourselves. We don't have strength on our own. Christ says put all the weight is on me, get close to him through prayer or Lectio. Neighbours can take us so far, but we will always need Christ. St Philip Howard was imprisoned in the Tower of London for 10 years with only his dog for company not knowing when he might be beheaded. He wrote on the cell wall, *The more suffering in this world, the less in the next*. Who was there for St Philip? He was alone yet kept his poise by relying on Christ.

[Fr Stephen concluded by inviting us to be prudent, to think about what we do. Don't watch too much news as it troubles our spirits, particularly last thing at night. We can do practical things to make ourselves feel better, but the best remedy is to feed our hearts with the love of God.]

We must be serene to be able to pass that love onto others. People can catch our inner poise if we radiate it. What we fill our minds with or don't, is important. Too much news, or late night messaging is negative and troubles our spirits. We need to be prudent; so that into our hearts we leave space for peace.

We need to be a particular rock for our young people, this is a moment of great concern for them, their world seems very small and a future difficult to comprehend. We must acknowledge their feelings but give them hope for the future.

We are to be the rock, not speaking, just staying still and being calm – having Poise.

Christine Evans and Katherine Bergin