Dear friends:

As we begin the Second Week of Easter, it is important for us to remember that it is still Easter: Easter is a season for us, and not just a day. It is important for us to try to keep our focus on the resurrection. In the words of David Light's lively composition, “We are an Easter people, and alleluia is our song!” If you need a lift, you might like to enjoy a children's choir at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3TjUkSZ0yg
– or sing along at https://www.sixmaddens.org/?p=2421

Have you noticed that we do not have readings from the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures during the Easter Season? When there are two readings prior to the Gospel, the First Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles or Revelation and the Second Reading from the Epistles. Also, during the Easter Season, the response to the Psalm may be Alleluia sung two or three times in lieu of the more usual refrains; in this case, the Gospel Acclamation and its verse may be omitted. Alleluia is such a powerful expression of our joy that it is sung; liturgically, at any time of the year, if the Alleluia is not sung as the Gospel Acclamation, it is more correct to omit the Acclamation.

It has become customary in many places to symbolically retire or bury the Alleluia on Shrove Tuesday for the whole of Lent; it is not a part of the Roman Rite liturgy during Lent. That is why it is received with such exuberance at the Easter Vigil. The word “Alleluia” or “Hallelujah” (from Hebrew הללויה) literally means "Praise the Lord" and as an expression of praise to God was preserved, untranslated, by the Early Christians as a superlative expression of thanksgiving,
joy, and triumph. (See Wikipedia entry “Alleluia” for a full explanation of this acclamation.

Today’s readings are: Acts 4:23-31; Psalm 2 (R: Happy are all who put their trust in the Lord); and John 3:1–8. The reading from Acts is a message for us at this time as it talks of the collective sharing of the community of believers, and the Gospel reminds us of our birth through water and the Spirit in baptism. Let us pray for all those who were anticipating being “born of water and the Spirit” at the Easter Vigil and now must wait for this rebirth. We also share with many of our students and their families as their completion of the Sacraments of Initiation in Confirmation and the reception of First Holy Communion is deferred.

For Adult Catechumens:
Father, through your holy prophets you proclaimed to all who draw near you, "Wash and be cleansed," and through Christ you have granted us rebirth in the Spirit. Bless these your servants as they earnestly prepare for baptism. Fulfill your promise: sanctify them in preparation for your gifts, that they may come to be reborn as your children and enter the community of your Church. We ask this through Christ our Lord. R. Amen. (from the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults)

For a child awaiting baptism:
All-powerful God and Father, you are the source of all blessings, the protector of infants, whose gift of children enriches and brightens a marriage. Look with favor on this child and, when he/she is reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, bring him/her into your own spiritual family, the Church, there to become a sharer in your kingdom and with us to bless your name for ever. We ask this through Christ our Lord. (From The Book of Blessings)

You may be interested in this reflective article from last week’s Globe and Mail; it offers some food for thought.

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-metaphysical-distancing-have-we-isolated-ourselves-from-god-too/

As we grieve with the people who mourn in Nova Scotia in the wake of the tragic shootings, we also acknowledge Yom Ha’Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance
Day) the observance which our Jewish brothers and sisters begin at sundown today. https://ritualwell.org/ritual/prayer-yom-hashoah-holocaust-remembrance-day

A prayer in the face of gun violence

Almighty God,

I come before you,
once again,
after another shooting.

I am sad, God.
So I ask You
to receive into your loving care the souls of those who were killed,
to care for those who were wounded or hurt in any way,
to console the family members and friends of those who died or were wounded,
to strengthen the hands of the rescue workers, medical professionals and caregivers.

I pray too for the shooter, as I must as a Christian.

All this makes me inexpressibly sad, God. But I know that the sadness I feel is your sadness.
It is the same sadness your son expressed when he wept over the death of his friend Lazarus.

I am tired, God.
I'm tired of the unwillingness to see this as an important issue.
I'm tired of those in power who work to prevent any real change.
I'm tired of those who say that gun violence can't be reduced.

All this makes me tired.
But I know that the tiredness I feel is your tiredness.
It's the same tiredness that Jesus felt after his own struggles
against injustice that led him to fall asleep on the boat with his disciples.

I am angry, God.

I am angry at the seeming powerlessness of our community to prevent this.
I'm angry at the selfish financial interests who block change.
I'm angry that these shootings happen at all. But I know that this anger is your anger
It's the same anger Jesus felt when he overturned the tables in the Temple,
angry that anyone would be taken advantage of in anyway.

Help me see in these emotions your own desire for change.
Help me see in these feelings your moving me to act.
Help me see in these reactions your pushing me to do something.

Because I know this is the way you move people to action.
And I know that you desire action.
For Jesus did not stand by while people were being hurt.
He plunged into their lives.

So help me to answer these questions:
How can I help?
How can I fight against gun violence?
How can I urge my political leaders to enact change?
How can I help people understand that this is an issue about life?
I am sad over the loss of life, 
tired of excuses for the loss of life, 
and angry that we are paralyzed by the loss of life.

So

Turn my sadness into compassion.

Turn my tiredness into advocacy.
Turn my paralysis into the freedom to act.

Help me 
to be compassionate 
to advocate 
and to act, 
as your son did, 
Almighty God.


Loving God, 
Welcome into your arms the victims of violence and terrorism. 
Comfort their families and all who grieve for them. 
Help us in our fear and uncertainty, 
And bless us with the knowledge that we are secure in your love. 
Strengthen all those who work for peace, 
And may the peace the world cannot give reign in our hearts.

- Author Unknown (source: Ibid)

Sometimes it gives us a bit of a shake-up to realise that, in our own struggle to face the trials of our situation, many others are sharing in that challenge and a great many people are dealing with losses far greater than freedom to move around as we are accustomed.

Let’s pray, too, for all who have lost loved ones at this time and who cannot engage in our usual ways of saying good-bye or of reaching out to loved ones for physical expressions of love and support. We send them our prayers and virtual hugs, and we pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died.

Finally, please find attached a very helpful resource from our Social Work staff. Thanks, to Patricia Webber-Callaghan and her team for preparing this, and to Patricia Codner, Chief Social Worker, for sharing this with me.
“The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.” (Genesis 31:49)

Gillian