



Reflection from Sr Margaret Atkins:

Out of the blue, most of the world was invited on retreat. We were forced to ponder our mortality, our vulnerability, our weakness, our ignorance. We were prompted to repent of the collective thoughtlessness of our modern way of life and its side-effects. We have had to slow down, to abandon our ordinary routines, to wean ourselves from the addictions of 'business as usual'. Our values have been overturned: care workers, fruit pickers, parcel packers and cleaners have become our new saints, while go-getters, celebrities and billionaires kick their feet in their own homes.

We have rediscovered our neighbours, and even our own families. We have shared our fears and anxieties; we have grieved together, even at a distance, for the wonderful individual human beings we have lost. We have publicly honoured courage, fidelity, and simple acts of kindness. We have learnt to value statesmanlike modesty, honesty and truthfulness over political bluster.

The religious among us have been praying more intensely, with more focus, than for decades, despite the disruption of our normal supports. And many, many others, who do not normally pray, have begun to join us, without embarrassment. We know that we cannot do this by ourselves.

And we have all been in this together: rich and poor, famous and unknown, old and young, strong and weak, from every corner of the globe, together, we have shared fear, anxiety, sorrow, compassion and love.

In our own country, at least, we were blessed with a backdrop of a glorious springtime. It was filled with birdsong we could hear, flowers we had time to notice, birds and animals that grew in confidence when we withdrew. "Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise?", wrote Pope Francis five years ago in *Laudato Si'*. Suddenly, the noise has stopped, and we have a chance to listen. Let us listen to the sounds of nature, let us listen to the tradition of our faith, and let us listen once again to the Holy Father's appeal. Re-reading *Laudato Si'* would not be a bad place to start:

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love

for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the Earth are crying out.

O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life,

to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

Praise be to you!

Amen.