

Homily: Easter Sunday 2020

It is very difficult this year to move from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, when the whole world is in such turmoil, and the suffering, the Virus and lockdown continues to change life for us all.

Whatever else, I have gone into church, without going out! and offered Mass and the Divine Office and The Rosary for you all every day.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols in an article for Good Friday headed 'There is light even in our present darkness,' mentions first Michelangelo's first and great masterpiece that greets visitors to St Peter's Basilica in Rome, the *Pieta*, which belongs to Good Friday.

It depicts, with utter tenderness, the moment when the dead body of Jesus is taken down from the cross, and laid in the arms of his mother Mary. The Cardinal reminds that this is a powerful image for all of us today, as we see and hear the daily roll - call of the number of people who have died, attributed to the virus, and often no relative can be with them in their last moments.

The Pieta is an image of profound tragedy and sorrow. All that is going on the moment is very harrowing. As on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the Church pauses in contemplation of the bleeding face of Christ, which conceals the life of God and offers salvation to the world.

At the Holy Saturday Office there is a reading from an ancient homily for the day. It begins: What is happening? Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps: the earth was in terror and was still.

How relevant for us today in Isolation, (or Solitude,) staying locked in, many in fear and some really trembling. We all long for an end to this worse than nightmare, and we know sooner or later it will.

As we hear the Easter morning Gospel there is at one level a sense of disappointment, for it seems a little flat, seems to present only half

the story, yes stone rolled away, yes empty tomb and grave cloths, but as yet no mention of Jesus. The empty tomb texts, like this gospel draw us back into the experience of the disciples on the first Easter morning with the unexpectedness of the discovery, the mental confusion, the haste and excitement, the questioning and eventual believing. Not being able to get to any church this year for Easter leaves us feeling somewhat as they did, not as jubilant and excited and joyous as other years.

St John notes it was very early on the first day of the week, it was to be the first day of the new creation. And it was still dark. Jesus the light of the world had been taken away from them by death. Gone was the light of those days of physical contact with Jesus. There was a finality about the rolling of the heavy stone across the entrance to the tomb, expressing the end of his life in the flesh. That Easter morning Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb but did not venture beyond, saying 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb.'

Peter, when he saw the empty tomb and the position of the grave cloths was left like a detective amassing a dossier of facts without knowing what to do with it. The beloved disciple made the step beyond the material evidence: He saw and he believed.

Belief opened their eyes to the new order of creation, a new way of understanding life. Later events would clarify that the new creation means the presence of the Lord in the community of believers through their sharing in the power of the Spirit. When the risen Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene later that day He told her not to cling to him physically, for the old order had changed. The stone is rolled back and the tomb is empty. The body is not here for He is risen and He is everywhere.

Our muted Easter celebrations very much reflect that first Easter Day. This year, more than most other years we can't take all in that is happening to the world and creation at the moment. At the end of it life could be very different, for many ended, but as one of the Prefaces for the Dead says, 'Lord for your faithful, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal

dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.’ Why because in Jesus the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come.

As ever the wisdom of the church gives us 50 days of Eastertide, and lockdown means we have more time to think and contemplate. And our contemplation of Christ’s face cannot stop at the image of the crucified, suffering one ***He is the Risen One.***

Were this not so, our preaching would be in vain and our faith empty. 1Cor 15: 14. May I suggest at some time you read the whole of chapter 15 of St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which is all about resurrection, and his absolute truth that ‘If Christ is not risen, then is our faith in vain: but Christ has in fact been raised from the dead.’

Alleluia: The Lord is risen! Have a happy and glorious Easter.