

Homily Easter Day Sunday 4th April, 2010.

Mass Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

Today celebrates what happened to Jesus, how He was raised from death on the cross. But principally the readings for the Easter liturgies, when you listen to them are all about what happened to the disciples. Firstly to Mary Magdalene, then the other women, then John, then Peter, then to the other apostles and to Thomas, and then finally Paul says about himself, *"It happened even to me, like one untimely born."* Peter in his address to Cornelius describes the significance of Jesus and then recalled what happened to him. He says that he and the other apostles and the women who accompany them, are the witnesses to what happened to Him. This explosive event of the resurrection occurred at the tomb and then reverberated through the lives of the first witnesses, then out into Jerusalem, into neighbouring towns and villages, then across continents and countries, then down the centuries to ourselves here at this gathering now, to this moment, to this place, to this Sunday evening, to you and me, here, now. We are celebrating today, therefore, not simply what happened to Jesus as an historical event, but because of this has happened to us, and goes on happening to us. It's people who change people. The resurrection is a continuing event, and you and I are the witnesses to that. For God there is no time – now past, no future, there is only now. Now we are in the upper room at the Last Supper. Now we are at the Cross. Now we are in the room with the closed doors into which Jesus entered and said: "Peace be with you."

There is a legend about a missionary. He was lost at sea, and was by chance washed up on the shore of a remote native village. Half dead from starvation, exposure, and sea water, he was found by the people of the village and was nursed back to full health. Subsequently, he lived among these people for 30 years. During the whole of that time he confessed no faith. He sang no songs. He preached no sermons. He neither read nor recited Scripture. He publicly made no personal faith claim. But when people were sick, he attended them, sitting long into the night. When people were hungry, he gave them food. When people were lonely, he was a source of company. He taught the ignorant. He was a source of enlightenment to those were more knowledgeable. He always took side of those who had been unjustly wronged. There was not a single human condition with which he did not identify. After 30 years had passed, missionaries came across the sea to the village and began talking to the people about a man called Jesus, and after hearing of Jesus, the natives insisted that he had lived among them for the past 30 years. "Come, we will introduce you to the man about whom you have been speaking," they said. The missionaries were led to a hut, and there they found their long lost fellow missionary whom they had thought dead. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever.

The clearest evidence, the most striking and convincing evidence of the resurrection, was what happened to those people who had been close to Jesus. And that doesn't change. You are the most convincing and powerful evidence of the resurrection - you yourselves. You are the witnesses and the missionaries. What is crucial here is that it is in the very basic adherence to the values of Jesus that you bravely adopt every day, and are not aware of it, that matters. I remember once trying to establish a liturgy for the children at Mass in one of our friaries, so that younger families could celebrate the Mass more comfortably with their children. But it

was very hard to establish. When I approached people asking them to take this on they were very hesitant. “Oh, I couldn’t I’m not confident enough,” or “I’ve not been trained properly.” In the end I said, “Look, you aren’t being asked to teach theology at Oxford, but just to be with them, and tell them some stories.” I put them in touch with the materials available, and it took off. That’s the resurrection.

What is it about your life that without Christ wouldn’t make sense? Where the evidence in you that fear is being conquered, a hard road being faithfully stuck to, a difficult relationship still being worked with, a painful wrong being forgiven, an adventurous risk being undertaken? That’s the resurrection. Where is that happening to another near you, and you are being asked to honour and preserve and enable it in the other? That’s the baptismal priesthood.

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark. This was hard for her. Making a faithful journey in the dark, stumbling as we go, is one all of us can identify with isn’t it? Sometimes we have days that are like this; sometimes weeks, months, or even years seem simply to be a stumbling on in the dark and it’s lonely, and cold, and the way ahead seems so unclear. Yet in Mary already the dawn was breaking. She was simply being faithful to the love she had in her heart. Basically you and I are not being asked to do more than that. If you think about it that is our whole vocation – to be faithful to the love in our heart. What does that mean for you at this point in your life? Do this and the gospel of the Lord Jesus will be preached, His message of the resurrection will be born witness to, the evidence of His resurrection will be given a testimony, and the life of the Church will be deepened.

It is so important to come here to receive the risen Christ so that we can more and more become like Him. To the extent that we come close to Him we become more and more like Him. To the extent that we share in the resurrection, in communion with the One who says He is the resurrection and the life, we become witnesses of it, evidence of it.

St. Peter might have said to Cornelius and his household:

“I saw the cross.
I betrayed Him.
I rejected Him.
I denied Him.
I ran away.
I entered darkness.
I wept bitterly.

Yet.....

I then ate and drank with Him.
I saw the look of love in His eyes for me.
I saw no anger, no resentment, no accusation, only forgiveness.
I heard Him reinstate me.
I heard Him call me shepherd.
I *felt* the keys in my hands,

I heard Him entrust His lambs and His sheep to this coward.”

What matters today is what happened to Jesus, but He doesn't want to keep such a victory to Himself so He always shares it, and He for ever shares it; firstly to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to John, to Paul and to all the others, and down the centuries.

What truly matters now is what is happening because of Him to you, and through you – it's people who change people.

You have your Saviour in you; you have your mission therefore also.
God bless you with His peace this holy day!