

Easter Day 2019 Year C

The extraordinary sight of Notre Dame in flames last week was one that seems far removed from the Easter Joy we celebrate today, yet even in Paris, the regular congregation and clergy of that great building will nevertheless be raising their Alleluias just as we do on this beautiful morning, albeit in another Parisian church. In some ways theirs will be even more fervent, bound up they will be with some sense of the fact that the desolation of a beloved place of worship could have been so much worse.

One image struck me particularly and I have mentioned it several times this week, because it seems to me to encapsulate the totality of our Easter journey. Shortly after the fire had been extinguished, a photo was taken looking up the building which revealed that the great 18th century sculpture of the Descent from the Cross by Nicholas Coustou above the High Altar was untouched. It takes the form of a Pieta. The dead Christ lays on his mother's knees, while she gestures both upwards and outwards – an offering by a mother of her son to God and humanity. Above this stands a great gilded cross, erected by Cardinal Lustiger in the 1980s. Through the smoke and chaos of fallen vaults and burnt and charred timbers, the cross glowed.

To me this is reminder that in the darkest situations of our own individual journeys, the great love which God bears for all creation is identified within our humanity through the self-giving love of Jesus Christ on the cross, and this love never leaves us. However, it is OUR response to inward and ever-present love which makes all the difference. Our call is to be open to this, to open the doors of our hearts to bring about the fulness of this love at play within our lives.

We have just heard Luke's careful description of the first Easter morning. He describes the women at the tomb and wants us to understand that they represent a faithfulness which is quite extraordinary. They have been present with Jesus for the whole of his ministry, from Galilee to Jerusalem, and their faith is in marked contrast to the male disciples, who seem so inadequate in the face of disaster which befalls Jesus.

It is the women, including his own mother, who have stood at the foot of the cross, watching the death-throes of the one they had followed through the streets of Jerusalem to Calvary. Their faithfulness extends to a desire to anoint his body on the first day of the week after the Sabbath rest. And it is they who become the witnesses to the empty tomb, subsequently taking this news to Peter and the other disciples.

How are we to approach this call to Resurrection Life? I must admit to feeling rather tired on Friday evening after the rigours of Holy Week and so ended up watching a programme which proved to be the final instalment about a group of celebrities walking on a quasi-pilgrimage to Rome. Bear with me, because I really only had heard of one or two of them. It was all very BBC. An actress and several comedians, a celebrity dancer, singer and an Olympic athlete, all on a journey. Extraordinarily, they were granted a private audience with Pope Francis, and not only did he display his expected humility, he also responded to a question put to him by one of the group. A comedian told the Pope that he had lost his mother and his twin sister in recent times, both of whom had been very religious. He

himself had no faith but recognised that he was searching but felt that he couldn't belong to a faith group who couldn't acknowledge him because he was gay. The Pope gave a profound answer which takes us to the heart of our Easter Faith.

If we define ourselves solely by an adjective; by gender, sexuality, wealth, position or any other of a host of single identifications; or if we treat other people in that way, discarding or disregarding those not like us, then we diminish both their humanity and ours. We forget the noun. In doing so, we shut down the Easter message which reveals the fulness of life to be found in the risen Lord, and to which all are called. Above all, we are called to love the world, with all its imperfections and frustrations, even the people and things which so annoy us. LOVE.

The disciples of Jesus, women and men alike, were themselves drawn to new life through his resurrection. They gained the capacity to love selflessly and found that this new life transcended every barrier because it was an expression of self-giving Love. It is the same for us. Christ's love floods the dark places of our humanity with transformational light which has the capacity to draw each of us to 'lives of gold' as George Herbert puts it in his poem for Easter Day. This doesn't mean that we are free from our own crosses of sorrow, desolation or temptation. Yet we are strengthened because Jesus also shared our journey through his passion and death. Yet through his Resurrection, we have the pathway to a light at the centre of who we are called to be – a transformation of Love, not just a gift to us, but to all we meet.

The Lord is risen! Alleluia!



Isaiah 65: 17-end

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Acts 10: 34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Luke 24: 1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look

for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.