

Easter Sunday 2011.

Last night at the Easter Vigil 5 people became Catholics and we give thanks for them and all the others throughout the world. We give thanks for their journeys, through different experiences of faith and religion, which have brought them to the point where they have decided to live the rest of their lives in the full communion with the Catholic Church. For most of them their life's journey has been in relationship with Jesus and now, this Easter, that relationship enters a new and deeper phase.

That growth in relationship with Jesus is true of them, of us and of Mary of Magdala, Simon Peter and the beloved disciple John in today's Gospel. Their relationship with Jesus had developed during their life and work together. They had all been touched by him in different ways. Now he had been killed and was dead and buried and they had to face the numb and sterile silence following the death of a loved one. Their relationship would pass into an increasingly distant memory or would it.

It was dark when Mary came to the tomb and John tells us that it was very early and therefore before dawn. But this is John writing and it would not be unreasonable to think that there was more in this darkness than meets the eye. Perhaps John wants us to cast our minds back to his Gospel which we heard at Christmas that stated quite clearly that Jesus, the Word of God was also the light. In fact Jesus' claim was that he was the light of the world.

Yes, the darkness in which Mary set out was the darkness which had been deep and intense since Judas Iscariot had left the supper room to prepare the arrest of Jesus. Just as he leaves St. John tells us that "night had fallen". This darkness was the pain of separation that death brings; it embraces the pain of any separation; any division; any sin and brokenness which cause fear of the dislocation of our lives. It is this darkness that is blinding and which leads the way to the pain and suffering in the world that we witness today.

The first one in the gospel today to pierce that darkness was John, the other and beloved disciple. He saw the grave cloths all on the ground and he came to believe in Jesus as the resurrection and the life. Mary of Magdala and Simon Peter would come to that light through faith in Jesus as the risen one a little later on.

Eventually the majority of his disciples came to believe that not only was he the Messiah, the anointed one, the saviour of the world. Now he was the resurrection and the life. He had risen from the dead and was alive and present in their lives. He was the light guiding them through every experience of darkness and in this light they could see his Holy Spirit at work in their lives and in the lives of those they loved because it was in love that they saw the light that Jesus is most clearly.

As it was for Mary of Magdala, for John and for Simon Peter, so it is for us. The resurrection of Jesus brings new life and makes us a new creation. As we renew our baptism and the commitment that follows this morning, we deepen our hope that baptism joins us to Jesus in his death and resurrection. We look forward to the fulfilment that this promise holds and that this life and experience will come to its perfection when we die and rise with Jesus into the life of God. Today proclaims that we are created to share for ever the life of the Trinity.

That hope of an eternal and bright future with God must not blind us to the present and to the difference that the resurrection of Jesus makes to the here and now. Peter, John, Mary and the others in those early days of the church were constantly surprised and often deeply challenged by the presence of the risen Lord in their daily lives. The challenge came when they saw that his Spirit and power was not under their control and that he was also present in the situations and lives of others that they had not expected. They soon came to know that while you could say where the risen Christ was at work, you could never say where he was not at work.

Today we rejoice and are glad because Jesus is risen. He is risen into our personal lives, our relationships and our community.

As Mary made her way to the tomb in the darkness, her journey speaks of prayer. It is in that experience of prayer that our lives become fertile ground in which the risen Christ can be recognised in our day to day experience.

That prayer which opens us to gratitude for his kindness to us leads us to the realisation that we are here in this world to so live our lives that his risen life is recognisable in us. Visible in that inner peace and tranquillity which his presence brings; visible and life- giving in the quality of our love which sees each other person as a gift to be accepted, respected and loved with Christ's own love. Visible in those challenge and demanding efforts to work for justice, peace and respect for creation and the environment which somehow shares in the power of resurrection.

“Just as Christ was raised form the dead by the Father's glory, we too must consider ourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”