

Homily for Easter Vigil

Just in our parish the Church will receive five new members: Angharad, Bunty, Francis, Roy, Claire and Stuart. We give thanks for them and for the gifts they bring to our community and to the mission of the Church. They bring with them the experience of their lives which includes their own relationship with God in Jesus Christ. In his own way God has guided them and, through prayer, relationships and other religious traditions, has brought them to this point when they feel that they want to live the rest of their lives in the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Their personal journeys, like our own journeys, are like the journey described in the readings we have heard proclaimed this evening. Those readings have described the struggles of human beings from the very beginning of creation to find meaning and order in their relationship with God. From the chaos of the first moments of time and prehistoric emergence and creation of human beings we have listened to the story that comes to its glorious completion in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Always aware that creation is incomplete and that there is suffering and evil always around, countless people have lived their lives looking forward to the moment when all would be complete and the darkness and pain would be finally healed and put right.

Two of those people who waited and hoped were Mary of Magdala and Mary who was the mother of James the Younger, and Joset and Salome. They had come to believe in Jesus and unlike his other male disciples who fled when things began to get difficult before Jesus' arrest, remained faithful and stayed with Jesus at the cross while he died. Out of loyalty and probably in that numb and anaesthetised state that follows immediately after the death of a loved one, they went on the first day of the week, which became our Sunday and the day of resurrection, to visit the sepulchre which contained the body of Jesus. They went, as anyone else would go after a death, just to visit the tomb or the grave, to pray and to remember. There were no expectations. Understandable therefore was their fear as they encountered the angel and his message that Jesus was not there because he had risen. Our hearts can almost feel their emotion as they set out to tell the others and as that emotion gave way to the deepest faith as they met Jesus and fell down and worshipped him. The dreadful experience of the past few days had now been replaced by the amazing and explosive truth of the resurrection.

The danger is to leave it there and to think that this is the end of the story. Jesus is risen and everyone lives happily ever after. But it is not like that. Jesus tells the women that the disciples, who had previously deserted him, must now leave for Galilee where they first met him, where they will meet him again.

They did follow his instruction and they did meet him but the experience of him was very different from the previous time. It is that difference that we must try and glimpse before we go home this evening.

St. Matthew tells us that Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to the tomb before dawn. That is important to note because they came when it was still dark. Our Lenten journey, life's journey, the story we have heard this evening, the stories of those who are becoming Catholics tonight all tell us that the darkness in which they travelled to the empty tomb was not just physical night time darkness. The darkness stands for all that is wrong in our lives. I mean the fear, the pain, the broken relationships, the lack of forgiveness, that ability within us to work against what is good and be destructive, the thing we call sin. The darkness invades not just our personal lives but also that suffering of so many throughout the world in the lives of those who do not have enough to eat and drink, who suffer incurable disease, who live in war torn situations where there seems to be an unending cycle of injustice and violence.

Mary of Magdala, the other Mary, Peter, James and John and the other disciples came to see and believe in their own particular ways and in their own time that Jesus' resurrection had somehow altered the darkness. Yes, what had happened to him would happen to them when they died but there was more to it than that. What had happened to him had happened to him

in this life before death. So St. Paul says that we are joined to Jesus in baptism so that we might live a new life.

That is the point of it all. We share in the resurrection of Jesus now and have become part of the new creation which he made possible by his death on the cross. Mary of Magdala and the other Mary discovered pretty quickly that they were alive to God in Christ Jesus and that ordinary life and creation took on a new sparkle, a new colour, a new light; like good news after a time of difficulty.

Yes, the darkness of pain and sinfulness still touches our experience but now the presence of Christ in our lives gives a new hope that need not be overcome by fear. Jesus tells his disciples to set out for Galilee and he says the same to us. Not necessarily to go to Galilee but to leave here tonight with a new confidence. A new confidence in the risen Christ present in our lives, from whom nothing in our lives can separate us. A new confidence which will grow in prayer which is that constant discipline of putting ourselves in the presence of Christ; a new confidence which will grow if we see others as gifts from God to be accepted and respected; a new confidence which will grow in our hearts if we give thanks in all circumstances because that kind of gratitude helps us see so clearly that creation, love, time, beauty and even the challenges from which we would hide are all shot through with the glory of God.

That is why this evening we are invited to see in water, light, oil, bread, wine and this community which gathers in Christ's name, the invisible power of the Holy Spirit becoming visible as he completes, reconciles and fills human experience.