

Fr James' homily for Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord 2021



First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 10:34, 37-43
Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4
Gospel: John 20:1-9

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Perhaps in our lifetimes never has it been more important to hear those words and to know that they are simple, literal truth. We have kept the memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus once again in a strange and unsettling way for many: In isolation, unable to gather to worship, sharing on-line with the worship of the Church perhaps, and in silent prayer.

I hope in a very particular way you took yourself last Sunday to the Mount of Olives and to Jerusalem with the crowds (*By the way, the link to the Guide to Holy Week from the diocese of Phoenix is still available from this website, and provides lots of valuable resources as you turn the pages*), to Bethany on Monday and Tuesday, to Gethsemane and to the Upper Room on Thursday, to Calvary and to the tomb on Friday and Saturday. In this we were united in prayer together. We were also doing something profound, as we told the story once more and read the scriptures, our worship changes us. Why does the church go to such great lengths to fill our worship with hymns, with stories that fill our senses? As one scientist has said: “hearing a story, a narrative, with a beginning, middle and end, causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human ability to connect, empathize and make meaning. Story is literally in our DNA.” If you like, that’s the science of our worship. By telling it, by praying it and singing it, we become part of it and understand it. And so we do today, finding perhaps unusual ways to proclaim Christ is Risen! Following the Passion of Christ, we become part of what is real - the redeeming love of God.

For in the accounts of Easter Sunday, all is new! The witnesses tell us that the SAME Jesus who had been put to death and buried was alive again. The very novelty of this is what gives energy to the first tellers of the story and that we inherit and share. They were not dealing in theories about what happens to the dead - and scripture, even the pages of the New Testament, show that there were at the time of Jesus many competing theories about what happens at death. Jesus’ Resurrection is NEW. From that moment everything else had to be re-evaluated. Nothing is the same. That is Christianity, then, and that is Christianity in the middle of the curse of Covid19.

Reducing the message that Christ is Risen to a symbol has been tried, even by apparently well-meaning “Christians.” Attempts are made to rationalize this story to a myth or a moral tale. This is a tired and pointless waste of time. The Gospel is specific: when; where; how; who. Peter, Mary, John, James, Thomas and the rest have

a shocking awakening to a new world, for which they will give their very lives. Nobody dies to defend a made-up story. Perhaps when they saw Jesus risen from the dead they were afraid - well, why not? It was a frightening thing. But perhaps they were afraid thinking He was back to take revenge on His betrayers, doing what we might do, or the movie scripts do so very satisfyingly. This story is different. He is not Risen for revenge, but breathes on them peace and forgiveness. Here is the love that gives meaning to all love, and swallows up hate. Here on Easter morning God says His ultimate Yes to all He has made. God has not given up on His creation. Like never before, today perhaps we understand the chaos made by our continual and cumulative No to God's ways. To all this God's answer is to save.

The liturgy of Easter Day says: “***This*** is the Day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” We live this Easter Day also surrounded by ongoing uncertainty and challenge. But our unique telling of the story this year must be for us a unique blessing: As never before we are aware that death is not a vague future idea, or something which secular culture would rather abolish and not talk of. Death is our companion always. But Christ has been there first and Christ is risen. Into all the fear around us, You and I, the Church, must bring the light of Christ's Resurrection if we know He is present here, on this day He has made. Time and again at the moment you hear it said “Nothing will be the same again.” Holy Church has been saying that for 2000 years. Our fears are no less today, but new once more is our faith in the Resurrection which leads us to value each moment as a Yes to God. Nothing will be the same again. Let it be true, not because of Covid19, but because Christ is Resen! Alleluia!

Fr Tom and I wish you a very blessed and joyful Easter!

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.