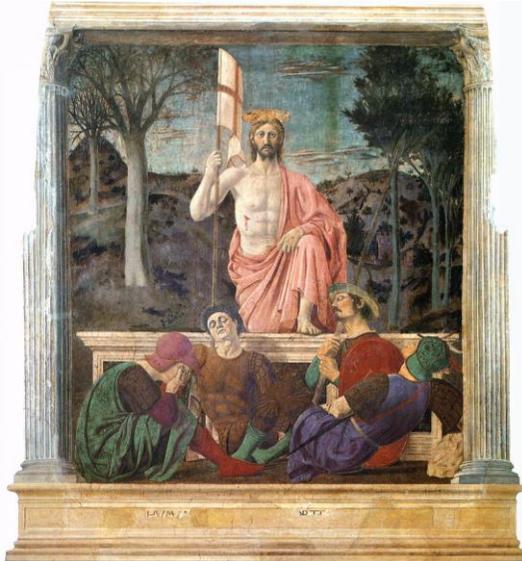


Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday (B)

1st April 2018

'That hidden moment'

Acts 10: *we have eaten and drunk with Him after His resurrection* Ps 117:
This is the work of the Lord, a marvel in our eyes. Col 3: *let your thought be on*
heavenly things Jn 20: 1-9: *he saw and he believed ...*



How did it happen? What was it like? What actually took place? I'm talking about the Resurrection. It's been the central feature of the Christian faith, from the apostles to our own day — 2000 yrs of the Gospel of Jesus's coming back from the dead — so you would expect that we would have some idea of what happened at the Resurrection. But we don't. We know that it happened, ... but we can't say how it happened, or exactly what it looked like when this momentous event took place. It took place in God's own

way, in God's own time, and known only to Him. Whereas the Crucifixion of Jesus took place in a bloody, violent, and graphically public way — and the Gospels furnish us with countless details about how He died — His rising took place in utter secrecy, and we have no details at all ... no details as to the moment. The whole Gospel account of Jesus's Resurrection concentrates on the announcement of His *having* risen: angelic messengers, heavy tomb-stone rolled back, grave clothes abandoned, and headband neatly folded, the empty tomb. But nothing as to the moment of rising, except that St Matthew mentions an earthquake. So: multiple evidence of the Resurrection having occurred, quite apart from when Our Lord begins to appear to His disciples in due course, ... but all four Gospels begin with the discovery of the empty tomb, and not with descriptive evidence of the actual event.

I was watching on Good Friday night, as a way of meditating on the sacred events of the day, the final 1½-hr episode of 'Jesus of Nazareth,' Zeffirelli's famous film of Our Lord's life: he follows the Gospel lead, in not

attempting to visualize the Lord's Resurrection, but in portraying the women approaching the tomb and encountering angelic messengers, and the soldier-guard baffled as to the empty tomb. Much Christian art does the same: it resists trying to depict this most mysterious of the mysteries, and often resorts instead to symbolic portrayals like the risen Jesus standing half-in/half-out of the grave bearing a banner of victory. Even studies of the shroud of Turin — if it is possibly the genuine garment of Jesus's burial — leads only to more questions: just how was that striking image of a Crucified one imprinted on the shroud's fabric? (We have no idea!)

Where does this leave us? Wouldn't we expect this unique event in human history to have been paraded before us, sceptic beings that we are? Wouldn't we have imagined that God would want the world to know, and cower, before His almighty power over life & death? Why didn't Jesus rise in full view of everyone, spectacularly and publicly? Then no-one, surely, could have denied its having taken place, and all would be converted? And yet, that was not

God's way. He replies to our brutal, noisy, public display of midday death on the Cross with a quiet, simple, hidden, night-time response of new life. His tender reply could not be more at odds with our vicious condemnation of Jesus. His gentle restoration to us of the Son of God, shows that His way is not that of forced conversion, but of invitation. Maybe we could liken it to the way we make up after a row: we might shout and scream for all to hear during an argument; but when we make up and forgive we almost certainly do so quietly, privately, and with hushed voices.

The presence of sin is noisily around us every day, in our communities, in the news, it seems ever-present and sometimes dominant; but the actions of love and faith are often quiet, hidden, and not attention-seeking. This is exactly how God responds in great love to our greatest act of sin: the Resurrection of the Son is quiet, and unnoticed. And only gradually does He draw into that circle of life-changing love the people that come to believe: first, Mary Magdalene and the other women who had gone to embalm the body, then the apostles; and then various others in the

group of disciples; and then, one by one, person by person, baptism by baptism, new followers. Each one hears the Gospel, comes to listen and learn from Christ, spends time with those who have learnt to love the Lord, and then commits with heart and soul to faith in Jesus Christ. We do not need loud crashing cymbals to announce the God of love: it is more convincing to have that personal encounter, the quiet voice of love and reassurance, which the Risen Christ offers us, through the Church.

Yes, the great mystery at the heart of our faith is Jesus overcoming death, rising in the same body that had lain in the grave in a Jerusalem tomb, leaving those grave-shrouds empty behind Him. And no-one saw it; but millions have come to believe it. Little by little, appearance by appearance, one by one, Jesus revealed this astonishing truth, that He was not defeated by mortal death, but that He had overcome it. Thank God we are some of those to whom God has revealed that — some of us have been baptized into faith in the Lord for decades; others will do / have done so just this weekend, but each one of us knows that the

Resurrection is for real. The apostles set out from Jerusalem to teach the whole world one they had seen the risen Lord; and each of the 2bn Christians alive today has inherited that same, unshakeable tradition of Good News.

So, today, Easter Sunday, the greatest feast of the whole year, recalling the greatest event of all the millennia of human history, we can sing and praise God joyfully for this Easter faith we have. Quietly He has sown in our hearts that faith that Jesus is the only way: Jesus is the only answer to overcoming sin, and living beyond the grave. As we renew our Baptismal Promises in a few minutes' time, let's do so with joy and with conviction: let's respond with our whole heart as we recite that 6-fold litany 'I do'! 'I do' ... 'I do' believe you, Lord; 'I do' want "to know You more clearly, love You more dearly, follow You more nearly, day by day" until I come to my own mortal death and can say 'I do' once more to Your offer of enfolding me tenderly in the Resurrection life.

Alleluia, the Lord is risen indeed! He has risen for mankind, and for me, so that I might live with Him for ever.