

Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday (A)

9th April 2023

'Triduum III: Unseen then & now Proclaimed'

Vigil readings ... Rom 6: *we went into the tomb with Him ... we too might live a new life.*

Ps 117: *I shall not die, I shall live and recount His deeds.*

Mt 28:1–10 *He is not here, He has risen!*

A priest friend in the north of England has had Covid these past three days, a *Triduum* of infection and feeling rough — yes, it's still out there! — and he had to cancel his whole set of Holy Week and Easter Vigil ceremonies! I can't imagine how sad that must have felt for him, unable to keep these most sacred days of the Christian calendar with his people! 3 years ago, in 2020, when the pandemic had just hit, and I had only my priest confrère to celebrate the *Triduum* with, that was pretty awful, too, a most disconcerting experience, and one that I am glad is now well in the past for us. That Covid year, 2020, I remember as another priest friend got all the elements ready for the Easter Vigil — his beautiful Paschal Candle, the font of Easter water to be blessed, his sanctuary decorated with flowers — all for his solo celebration, and he commented, sadly, “No-one to see it; no-one to participate physically, visibly.” And it prompted

me to reply, “Well, Jesus rose with no-one to see it, don't forget that!” And it's true. The accounts of Easter in the Gospels don't begin with *witnesses* to Jesus's actual rising, or even the appearance of the risen Jesus; they begin with experiences such as an earthquake, and the sight of the empty tomb with the stone rolled back. Because He rose in the dead of the night — who knows at what hour? — unseen by anyone, completely hidden and quiet, delicate and yet powerful. The first Easter was a solo affair, totally private to God and the angels! Jesus rose in the night, early Sunday, before daybreak, to get on with that great task ahead of Him, to start building the Church that even then had no idea what awaited them!

But though Easter began so small, its effects have grown and grown, touching the lives of *billions* ever since: Christians who have declared their faith in Jesus, been baptized into His name, and ordered their lives by the twin principles of love of God and love of neighbour. It was at first something so quiet and hidden that no-one saw, and yet billions have come to believe in it, and it has become a

feature of the earth that cannot be hidden: the reality of Jesus, the Son of God, risen and alive and animating His Church with His all-powerful Spirit of love, prayer, sacrifice, and service.

All this reminds us, then, that in whatever numbers, vast or small, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses are celebrated — in magnificent cathedrals with professional choirs; or in hiding in underground chapels where the faith is adhered to at such risk to life; or in a university chaplaincy out of term-time, but with the *best* choir, servers, congregation! (or even in a private oratory with a priest, alone, shielding from Covid!) — yet the effects of the Easter celebration cannot be hidden, cannot be contained, or quiet, or ineffectual! The bursting-forth from the tomb-of-death by Jesus — the divine light of healing and victory that shines forth from His Resurrection — cannot be contained or hidden. The ‘Light of the World’ is always the ‘Light of the *World*’: that light is active, bright, and healing, as it shines from and in the people of God alive in the Spirit! Think how just a single

flame, that one light of the Paschal Candle carried into a dark chapel, for example, already gives light in the darkness. A *single flame* means we can see, howsoever small it is; it is already utterly different to sheer darkness. And a flame can spread, and spread fast, when the conditions are right. That is what we are about here: we are not here to keep the faith, or the light of faith, to ourselves. We are here to spread it. Newman House needs to be a powerhouse of spreading the Gospel! And so, it is a delight that tonight we have two to be baptised and to receive the light of Christ; and indeed we also have quite a few around the Chaplaincy, some already very active in our community, who are thinking seriously about becoming Catholics in the coming year. This is how it should be.

When one reads the Scripture accounts of this unique and irreplaceable event of Easter — it doesn’t matter which one of the Gospels you take to read about the Resurrection, any one of them treats this event in its final chapter or two — and then one goes on immediately to start reading the Acts of the Apostles, one sees the rapid

spread of that life-changing, history-changing Good News for humanity. That first Easter, yes, began so small, but it spread fast, and far, because the disciples, the newly-baptized ‘ran with it.’ We are called to ‘run with it’ too, to carry that news of Jesus’s rising from the dead to all those around us who do not have this ‘anchor of hope’ that we have. As we celebrate tonight with Jed and Shanley, the joy of their Baptism also infects and affects us, as we are renewed in our own Baptism hope. The faith of every single one of us matters; the baptism of every single new Christian matters — for Jesus wins the victory, one soul at a time.

Hence the importance the Church attaches to renewing our Baptismal promises at Easter: we are, please God, prepared by our Lenten disciplines, forgiven in heart through a recent Confession, and ready to be refreshed by the Easter water, sprinkled on us, ‘waking us up,’ as it were, from any lethargy of Christian practice. This is our mini-Resurrection this Easter, as every Easter, recalling and celebrating our original resurrection into Christ on our

Baptism day, and also a sign and hope of our one-day Resurrection after death. It all started small, a few drops poured on us, perhaps witnessed by very few, but destined to become something very big and significant. Just as the Good News began so small, almost unknown in a Jerusalem night, but now spread to every corner of the known world, so our own Baptismal faith is to spread to each and every little corner of our lives, every part of our being. Our Baptism, our daily Gospel commitment, our Easter faith, is *everything* to us, and others should see this. If it truly *is* lived as the defining characteristic of our existence, others can’t help but notice it; and the faith will spread, Jesus will be known and loved, and His victory will be won in more and more humble hearts.

Alleluia, alleluia! The Lord is truly risen! — so “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord!”