

Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday (C)

19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> April 2025

‘Triduum III: Evidence for the Resurrection’

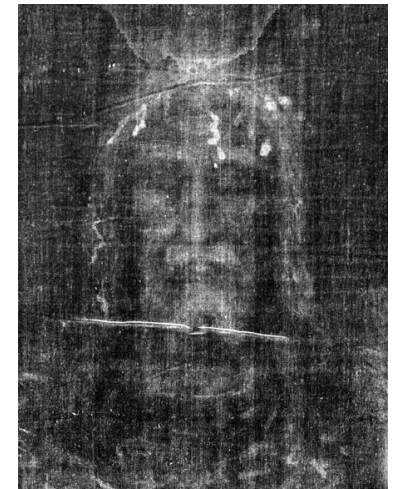
Vigil readings ... Rom 6: *we went into the tomb with Him ... we too might live a new life.* Ps 117: *I shall not die, I shall live and recount His deeds.*

Lk 24: 1–12: *He is not here, He has risen.* Or: Jn 20:1–9.

On Thursday we saw Jesus washing the Apostles’ feet, and instituting both the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and the Priesthood; yesterday (Good Friday) we saw the physical agony He underwent and the blood pour from His wounds as He scaled Calvary and the Cross. All of this is very physical, very tangible, fleshly and *sacramental*: Jesus is not ethereal, other-worldly and theoretical, and nor is our faith. And this is the key to our whole Easter celebration, as we come to the culmination of our Paschal Triduum with this Vigil / Easter Sunday Mass. The Resurrection of Jesus is a physical event, in history, in a time and place, really true; it doesn’t exist on some merely spiritual plane — how could it? Jesus existed; He truly suffered under Pontius Pilate the Roman Procurator of Judaea; He truly died by Crucifixion, which was made sure of by that soldier’s lance; He was truly buried in a hurry before Sabbath in a nearby tomb given by Joseph of

Arimathea — His followers noted the place, and all came sorrowfully away. These are facts of history. His body truly lay in that tomb enshrouded in death, the body of the Son of God, in which He had lived His 30 yrs of earthly ministry, and in which He had died so cruelly at our hands.

There’s always lots of interest in the shroud that is claimed to be Jesus’s burial cloth, the Shroud of Turin; I’ve seen news stories again in recent weeks as scientists attempt to unravel the mystery of the Shroud, and to glean data from it



as to the physical form of the one it wrapped, perhaps Jesus. A while back there was launched a new website (<https://www.shroudphotos.com/>) making freely available to the public in digital form the whole set of high-definition photos taken for an in-depth study, 40yrs ago. I’ve never seen the shroud myself; it only goes on display about every 10yrs, and it was due to be exposed again to

public view again this year, but let's see ... Of course there *are* questions as to its authenticity, but one of my theology lecturers in Rome, a Jesuit priest and brilliant teacher, Fr Gerry O'Collins, dedicates many pages in one of his [books on Christology](#) to a detailed analysis of the Shroud, and what it could mean. So many of the details evident from the shroud regarding the suffering of the one whose body was wrapped in it tally with the particulars we know of Jesus's Crucifixion. Then there's the question of the completely unknown way in which such an image can have been formed — if it were a mediaeval forgery, how could anyone possible have had the technology to have produced it, when even 21<sup>st</sup>-c. analysis can't explain it?

My point is not to state that the Shroud is or isn't Jesus's actual burial cloth (though I think on balance that it's highly likely that it is), but that our Easter faith — our belief in the *bodily* Resurrection of Jesus — is based on facts, historical events, physical evidence. We see this even from the very beginning, from the Gospel accounts, from the eye-witnesses of that Sunday morning. The first

news of the Resurrection is not based just on the women's verbal report of an angelic message. It is based on their sight of the *empty tomb, the cloths* lying there that had been used to wrap Jesus's body and face. It's based on *Peter's (and John's) viewing* of that same burial place, going right in to that space, and against all their expectations, finding it without the body of Jesus who was buried there only the previous Friday evening. In due course, it will be based on the *physical evidence of their seeing Him again* with their eyes, *hearing Him again* with the ears, spending time with Him, and receiving from Him again some further teaching. And all this will be crowned with the all-surpassing witness that the apostles gave with their lives: they willingly suffered *martyrdom* for the sake of the truth of the Gospel in the risen Jesus. The heart of their preaching was that Jesus, crucified and dead, had truly risen again. They gave their lives for that truth.

When we celebrate Easter, therefore — this highpoint of the Church's year, *its greatest feast* — we know we are proclaiming a truth that is most central to

Christianity, and which is also based on good and solid evidence. It's not a whimsical fancy, that 'Jesus lives on in our hearts, or our memories' or something. It's based on the *empty tomb; the body gone; the sight of Jesus risen; the apostles' fearless preaching* of the Resurrection. It's based on the *reality* of God-made-man specifically taking onto Himself the worst of evils and sin, even to the point of allowing that hatred to carry Him to brutal death, but then breaking those bonds of death and springing forth anew, bursting forth from that grave in a glorious new way. All this was pre-planned by the Father, so that mankind should be able to see in Jesus what humanity is meant to be, when raised by God's grace and forgiveness.

As always, what Jesus does is not for Himself, but for us. *His life was for us; His death was for us; His Resurrection is for us.* Therefore we cannot just say, "Take it or leave it." There can be no fence-sitting over the question of Jesus's being raised from the dead. If it's true — and all the evidence is there for its being physically, historically, literally, true — then it's the most important

thing to have happened in human history. It should be on everyone's lips, on everyone's agenda, the heart of everyone's life. And it is our task, as the followers of Christ, to make clear this truth — true, that is, for *all* people — with the same committed faith as did the women who went to the tomb, the apostles, St Paul, and all those early Christians. Our whole life can be guided by our Easter faith, *Alleluia* should be our perpetual song, and our living without sin, with Jesus's mercy, should be our perpetual aim so as to gain the Resurrection life in heaven with the Risen Jesus. We cannot live our daily life without reference to Jesus crucified and risen — He should be the centre of every day, the centre of our earthly life, since there is no life beyond the grave that is not intrinsically linked to the Resurrected Jesus: only He can provide that life beyond death. Let's not be blinkered, let's not be distracted, or 'too busy'; let's not be afraid to speak of or show openly our faith in Jesus. His Resurrection is the heart of what it means to be human; living this *earthly* life as He did, with the hope of *eternal* life that only He offers.

Our beautiful celebration this (last) night at the Vigil, and again tomorrow (this) morning, is filled with physical actions and symbols, elaborating on and illustrating the great Easter mystery. As the penance of Lent progressed into the rigours of Passiontide and then into Holy Thursday and Good Friday, the chapel here got barer and barer, more stripped-back and austere, as we made our way towards the stark horror of the Cross. But now, with life resurgent, and Christ risen, we celebrate with colour, candles, light, flame, flowers, blessed water, sprinkling, saints' images, and, of course, many *Alleluias!* We celebrate in bodily, physical, sacramental ways that appeal to our physical nature as well as speaking to our spirit. We rejoice in exultant, exuberant ways at the real physical rising of Jesus from death, for His victory brings real new life overcoming real death. Let's enjoy with an immense outpouring of love between us, and towards all our fellow men, the life-changing news that Easter is. Remember, the Easter season ahead of us is 7 wks, longer than the Lent we have just concluded. Yes, I know that

Easter tide is also exam-tide — I need hardly remind you! — but maybe that's a good thing. Surround yourselves as we move soon into the third and last term of the academic year with the joy of Jesus's rising; gaze at the light, see the colour, the flowers; hear the music; smell the scents; and know for sure through these vibrant signs of life that Jesus holds you in faith and love through your Catholic faith — the most important dimension of your human existence, is to be held safely by the Risen Jesus. What a special joy it is (was) tonight (last night) to welcome three new members into our Catholic family through the celebration of their Confirmation and First Holy Communion. This is a great new beginning for them, a key turning-point of their life; and as they make this definitive new step towards Jesus, may their example help us to be renewed in faith too.

*Alleluia, Lord Jesus! Alleluia, You are Risen! Lift us up to heaven through the defeat of death, and help us first in this life to live daily the transforming spirit of Your Resurrection: may we live our Baptism as a refreshing water for the world, a spiritual font, bringing as many around us as we can to life in You, the Saviour of the World!*