

Easter Vigil (C)

(Genesis 1:1-2:2 / Genesis 22:1-18 / Exodus 14:15-15:1 / Isaiah 54:5-14 / Isaiah 55:1-11 / Baruch 3:9-15.32-4:4 / Ezekiel 36:16-28 / Romans 6:3-11 / Luke 24: 1-12)

26.03.2016

Why did the women go to the tomb?

They wanted to honour the mortal remains of Jesus by anointing the body with the spices they had prepared. The Master had been buried in haste before the Sabbath, without any possibility given to them to carry out for him the customary gestures of respect for a deceased loved one. The women wanted to remedy their regret about this. Although well-intentioned in their desire to honour Jesus' dead body, the women were to discover that their proposed gesture was futile. The body was no longer there. The tomb was empty. The two men the women encountered at the grave told them Christ was alive, resurrected. *Why look among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here. He is risen.*

We heard why the women went to the tomb.

Why did we come here tonight? What is it that led us to participate in this liturgy?

I have no doubt that we have all come to this place well-intentioned – just like those women who went to the Easter Garden – but, are our reasons for being here any more appropriate than those of the women who went to Jesus' tomb? What did we expect to find here tonight?

The women set out for the Easter Garden expecting to find a corpse. They certainly did not expect to find an empty tomb. Maybe the question the two men put to them can be heard not just as the announcement of surprising Good News, but with an element of reproach to it. *Why look among the dead for one who is alive?*

After all, we are told in the gospels that Jesus had spoken to His disciples in terms of resurrection. He had predicted that he would *be put to death and on the third day rise again*. Had the women not been privy to this message, first spoken to the disciples who walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry? We are told that the disciples had discussed among themselves what Christ's words could mean. Had the women not heard echoes of these discussions, even if they had not been part of them themselves?

All the resurrection accounts note an element of surprise – not to say, astonishment, shock, stupefaction – when the disciples are accorded the grace of meeting with their Risen Lord. This indicates that Jesus' closest companions would seem to have forgotten their Master's words, or, if they recalled them, they had failed to believe in them – certainly, they seem not to have fully grasped their significance.

We profess to being Christian. Indeed, in the course of this Solemn Vigil, we will renew our profession of Christian faith. At the very core of our profession of faith, which we renew each Sunday by the recitation of the Creed, we affirm belief in the resurrection.

I wonder just how accorded we are to those words we recite so often.

The apostle tells us that *if Christ is not risen from the dead and if we do not believe in His resurrection, then our faith is in vain*.

Do we truly 'get' that?

We are all familiar with the resurrection story. The different resurrection accounts are well known to us. While we might approach and understand these texts in slightly different ways (and this can be entirely legitimate), basically we subscribe to the notion of resurrection: Christ's resurrection and our own promised resurrection. But, that is not enough. It is still not enough for us to say that we firmly believe in the resurrection of Jesus – even as an historical event. Nor is it sufficient for us to take things one step further and say that we not only believe that Christ is risen, but that we too

shall rise again with Him on the last day. Something more than that is required of us! To think of the resurrection solely in terms of a past event concerning Jesus or a future promise concerning ourselves is not enough. **The resurrection must be experienced as a present reality!** The Anglican theologian, H. A. Williams, captures this well when he claims in his book *True Resurrection* that *the resurrection of Jesus must be experienced as more than a past historical event, otherwise it is robbed of its present impact*. A little further into his book he writes that *just thinking in these terms means that for most of the time resurrection means little to us. It is remote and isolated. And, that is why for the majority of people it means nothing*. Rather than lament over this, Williams goes on to make this further claim: *People do well to be sceptical of beliefs not anchored in present experience*.

It seems to me that Williams' thesis about the irrelevance of resurrection relegated to a past event concerning Jesus can be applied to that other way of seeing things I have already alluded to: projecting the resurrection as something in the future which will concern us only when we die. To think of our resurrection solely in terms of a future hope also robs the resurrection of what Williams calls its *present impact*.

All that to say that the call I hear addressed to us tonight comes down to this: **we are called to think of – indeed, to live – the resurrection in the here and now, as a present reality of our lives.**

The call I hear addressed to us tonight is to consider the impact of what we celebrate in this Solemn Vigil upon our daily living – not only for the few days of religious festival surrounding our Easter commemoration, not only for the fifty days of the season, but each and every day of our lives, day in and day out, week after week, month after month, year after year.

To come back to the question I posed earlier: Why did we come here tonight? I ask it of myself, as much as I ask it of you. I invite you to pose this question each one for your self and not only for those you see sitting beside you as you glance around this church. What did I come looking for in this place tonight?

Writing to the Philippians Paul told them what he went through life looking for. He explained: *All I want to know* (all I am looking for, we could read) *is Christ and the power of His resurrection*. Can we subscribe to that? Is Christ all we want to know? Did we come here tonight so that we might experience Christ's resurrection?

If we are really alive in Christ, as we are called to be, then the power of His resurrection will be the driving force, the dynamo, of our lives. When, through faith, we fully accept Jesus for who and what He claims to be – *the resurrection and the life* – then we experience the Risen Christ to be alive within us and we are led to bear witness to His resurrection by the whole of our lives. We are brought to the point where we can echo Paul's words, making them our own: *For me life is Christ*. As a result of that, when others are searching for a glimpse of Jesus, looking to be shown that Christ is risen and alive, they should be able to look to us and conclude. *It is true: Christ is alive, He is risen. We see Him to be living in these Christian people*.

Why look among the dead for one who is alive?

May we not go from this place like the walking dead, but as men, women fully alive. We are sent forth to share with the world the resurrection message. May we dare to live *in Christ* (to use that phrase so dear to Paul), so that words the Book of the Apocalypse attributes to Jesus may be seen to be fulfilled in our lives. The words I am thinking of are those put into the mouth of that personage referred to as *The Living One* this phrase: *I live, you also shall live*.

When we truly live *in Christ* we become living proclamations of the resurrection of Jesus. When we live to the full our lives become an invitation for others to choose life. Seeing us to be fully alive in Christ, others will want to experience what we are seen to enjoy.

Even if we could not quite answer the question posed at the outset of this reflection – *why did I*

come here tonight? – it is to be hoped that we go forth from this place aware that a mission has been confided to us here.

We are sent forth from this place tonight to proclaim the Easter message: *Christ is alive. He is risen.* May the resurrection of Christ have a *present impact* upon us. May we be witnesses to what has been called the *present risenness of Jesus* by the way we live our lives!

Amen!