

The Easter Vigil (A)

(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 / Matthew 28:1-10)

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The angel said to the women: *I know you are looking for Jesus.*

If the angel stood before us tonight would he be able to say that to us?

**Are we looking for Jesus?**

As I speak those words I hear in the background St Benedict's requirement of the one who presents himself at the door of the monastery seeking entry into the novitiate. It is to be asked: *Does this person truly seek God?*

To seek God is not something that only monks do. Every Christian is called to be a God-seeker – someone who is on the look-out for Jesus.

And so, **all of us who are gathered here tonight must ask ourselves if we are truly looking for Jesus.**

Maybe we once ardently sought the Lord, but it could be that with the passage of time we have grown a little complacent.

Even though we have come here tonight and are sitting through a long Vigil liturgy, it could be that some of us have given up on – or, at least, are lagging behind in – our search for Jesus. Our ardour may well have weakened with time.

Or perhaps, even worse still, it could be that our downfall is this: to imagine that we have found Jesus once and for all and so to esteem that there is no longer any real need for us to seek Him out.

After the initial question which the gospel passage read flagged up for us – **Are we seeking Jesus?** – another question arises. It is this: **Who is the Jesus we are looking for?**

Linked to that last question is another very important issue. It is the issue of the relevance for our lives of the One we are looking for.

Sitting here tonight we must dare to ask ourselves in all honesty: **Is Jesus truly relevant for me?**

Is Jesus really relevant or is He one step removed from me? Or, it might be better to ask: am I one step removed from Him?

So often we are inclined to prefer to opt for a safe distance from Jesus in order to safeguard our independence.

It is easier for us to relate to a Jesus who is simply some figure from a bygone era, however extraordinary a figure that might be.

We can think of Jesus as a marvellous wonder-worker, a great teacher, an exemplary human being, someone who walked the face of the earth for a time some two thousand years ago, someone who continues to inspire many people by the stories recounted about Him and the sayings attributed to Him, without this really impacting our lives.

However praiseworthy it may be for us to think of Jesus as an extraordinary historical figure, what does it mean to relate to Him only in this way – as a man of yesteryear?

Does this really make Jesus relevant in our lives today?

According to a dictionary definition, the word *relevant* means appropriate to the current time, period or circumstances; of contemporary interest; closely connected to us, to what we do, to how we are.

**A relevant Jesus is One who will change our lives drastically.**

We opened this celebration by gathering around the paschal fire and as we prepared to light the paschal candle in whose glow the resurrection gospel is proclaimed tonight we said: *Jesus Christ yesterday, today and the same forever.*

**The Jesus proclaimed here in these words from the Letter to the Hebrews is clearly a relevant Jesus.**

We must ask: **Is the Jesus we came here looking for tonight**, not only the Jesus of the past, but **the Jesus of today, the Jesus of the present moment, the Jesus of the here and now of our lives?**

In his Letter to the Colossians Paul speaks of **Jesus** in terms of **a present reality**. I think of this little phrase found in that letter: *The mystery is Christ among you, your hope of glory.*

Faith in Jesus as a present reality in our lives carries with it implications for the way we live the here and now of our existence. It reminds us that we live not for ourselves alone, but for Him who shares with us His glory.

**To live our lives always on the look-out for Jesus, ever present to Him, ever ready to recognise His presence to us, in and through every person we meet, in every circumstance of our lives, this is the most radical demand of Christian faith.**

If we are always looking for Jesus, then we continually discover that He is alive; we come to see that the One who is Risen from the dead is, in fact, with us here and now. **The resurrection must be experienced as more than a past historical event.**

The Anglican theologian H.A. Williams is clear on this. In his book *True Resurrection* he explains that the reason why the resurrection means so little to us – and to others – is that it is seen as remote and isolated.

To have an impact upon our lives **Jesus must be experienced as alive**; we need to take seriously His promise: *Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.*

**Christ's resurrection needs to be experienced as present risenness.**

Once we set out to look for Jesus, after the question – *Who is the One we are looking for?* – yet another question arises for us. To this question many of us anxiously seek an answer tonight: *Where is the Risen Jesus to be found?*

The gospel passage we read at the heart of this Solemn Vigil answers that question by its reference to Galilee.

What the angel announced to the women who came looking for Jesus, instructing them to tell his brothers that they should go to Galilee, giving them the assurance that they would find Him there, really amounts to saying this: **Jesus is to be found in the ordinary, everyday experiences of His disciples' lives.**

Galilee is where the disciples came from; it is where their families were; it is where their place of employment was to be found.

**It is in all the ordinary, everyday places of our lives that the Risen Christ gives us rendezvous.** So often we go looking for Him in far-off places when, all the while, He awaits us quietly and humbly there where we live – in those areas and domains of our everyday lives,

the places where we are called to go about our daily existence, living in simple relationships with the people with whom we are called to share our lives.

**But, even before that, it is within ourselves that the Risen Jesus makes Himself manifest and awaits to be found.**

His word is sure: *I am with you always.*

**The Risen Christ lives within each one of us. We are led to find Him to the extent that we dare to live with and in our true self.**

**The call addressed to all who would like to meet with the Lord is to make the journey into their own heart, the depth of their being wherein He delights to make His home.**

If only we recognised that our hearts are what constitute the place wherein the Lord longs to meet with us, then we wouldn't be constantly fleeing ourselves, thereby passing Him by, as we are wont to do.

St Augustine's famous words about seeking the Lord outside of himself for so long only to discover that all the while the Lord was awaiting him within are not far from my thoughts, but so too are some lesser known lines from the writings of the great doctor of Hippo. I feel compelled to share these lines with you tonight for I believe that they remind us to what extent the wonder of resurrection is within our grasp. Augustine makes it clear that the real journey we have to make is the inner journey; we must travel in depth more than in distance to meet with Jesus. I quote from Chapter 8 of Book X of Augustine's Confessions: *Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars and they pass by themselves without wondering.*

How easily all of us can pass by what St Paul calls *the mystery of Christ alive within us.*

**In our lives as they are, with their ups and downs the Risen Christ awaits us.**

The Risen Lord is there for us in our joys and sorrows, in sickness and in health, when we are discouraged and elated, in success and in failure, when we are with loved ones and when we are alone ... at all times and in all places.

If in yesterday's celebration of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ I invited you to look with me to the message written on the icon of the cross we venerated in the Sacred liturgy to read its message calling us to unity in Christ, tonight at the heart of this Solemn Vigil I invite you to look once again at an icon: the icon of the Risen Lord which was presented to your veneration after the Gospel Proclamation of His resurrection. What you will see when you contemplate this icon are the depths to which Christ has descended – the depths to which He still descends for us: the depths of hell!

When we presented the icon before you after the resurrection gospel proclamation we intoned words from the epistle to the Hebrews: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.* What a truly marvellous sign of hope and consolation is given to us in this Sacred Image, for in it the Risen Lord is depicted as standing at the gates of hell, bringing forth from that place of darkness those held captive there.

The message could not be any clearer: **Even if our lives are hell, the Risen Lord is there with us. If only we could see Him!**

We came here looking for Jesus. It is to be hoped that the liturgy we are celebrating here tonight may be for all of us a privileged place of encounter with the Risen Christ, but, let's be careful to remember the gospel's message: the place where Jesus awaits that we find Him is in our Galilee. The Risen Jesus awaits us in our Galilee... that's to say, in the ordinary, everyday circumstances of our lives, even when (perhaps especially when) our life

experiences are proving to be a real challenge to us because of the somewhat harsh circumstances we must endure, the really difficult passages we are led to traverse.