

Easter Vigil Dawn Mass Homily 2020

St.Margaret of Antioch Leigh-on-Sea

I was asked by a parishioner earlier in the week about what strange places I had celebrated Holy Week and Easter in my time as a Military chaplain. I didn't give a full answer but preparing throughout this week and especially for this dawn, has brought many memories flooding into my mind as if they were but a few moments ago. It is a feeling so appropriate for this most holy of days. For time is swept away, the past becomes the present, and the future breaks into the present. The kingdom of God opens its timeless gates for all people in all places and times. Adam is dragged from the grave, a new light shines upon the darkest of times.

The only other time I have celebrated the whole of the vigil mass outdoors was Kosovo, nearly twenty years ago. Under the hour! A small group of Royal Marines, sailors, a brave Army pilot (brave for the company he was keeping not occupation) and myself, drove to the top of the mountain overlooking Pristina airport. We lit a little fire and celebrated as we are doing now – rounded off with a toast of champagne I have to admit (I won't be having that today)

It seemed a tad eccentric in the midst of a war and peacekeeping operation I guess as we set off in our three Land-rovers. Two of them were baptised and one – the army pilot who was also a lapsed catholic was so moved that he vowed to take up his faith again – I pray he still is. The marine who spent all week decorating eggs was a tad cross as he couldn't roll them down the planned slope as it turned out to be a minefield.

It is exactly 40 years ago that I was confirmed at 0400 on Easter day as a young student, yes I was once, surrounded by 100 fellow mad-folk in central London at what was the University Church of Christ the King. It seems both lonely and strangely joyous to be present this morn even without the crowds back then – including the police to see if everything was "alright" as we danced around the Bloomsbury square and censed their police car all those years ago.

I vowed never to miss a communion day – a Sunday or feast that morning and how my heart breaks for those who cannot at this present time – and

even more for those who do not wish to. There is a poignancy this Easter and yet the dawn has risen and will strengthen. We were meant to baptise (young paddy young will be baptised as soon as we are able) we were meant to be together. This dawn tells us we **will be** not just again in this life but forever in a new and wonderful way.

Two weeks ago when we were thinking about the death and the raising of Lazarus on Passion Sunday we were told that the worst of this crisis was to come. I said that if true it will come as we Christians enter Holy week and Easter - when we enter the Holy Land with Jesus as if it were now.

Past present and future do indeed become squashed. In our crisis we have walked with Jesus in the last week of his earthly life and the teeth of his earthly crisis - a crisis that defined who he was, and is and ever shall be. We are called to **re-member** so much, not least in our personal stories, and nothing is hid for his light reveals all. We recall his darkest time, and perhaps some of our too, and now also the time of his glory as we do in this and every Eucharist - His life giving sacrifice. But we do this not just as a remembering of past but as a death defeating protest that we by his grace are part of his future where one day is like a thousand.

We are called as Christians not to share a nice thought or metaphor but real news, good news that Christ is risen. For the first Christians it was a fragile, scary, dangerous, and challenging time. No simple magic wand, or vapid optimism but real hope – a hope that faces all realities however dark.

This news gave them hope to face death and persecution, it gave them power to hope “with their sleeves rolled up” to make a new community, it gave them a real resilience as they grew in the knowledge and understanding of this news. We have the same good news – do we have the same hope, resilience and confidence to pray the Prayer of Christ – thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Each must speak and act for themselves but as we renew vows made perhaps many years ago the answer must be yes not just for our sake but the world we are called to share that Good News with. Alleluia Christ is risen. He is risen indeed alleluia.