

Easter Vigil Homily 2023.

One of the privileges and challenges for the priest or deacon at the Easter Vigil mass is the singing of the exultat. It is the most ancient of hymns at the start of the most ancient of liturgies in the church year – evidence goes back to the first century when Christians gathered – remember in small numbers – remember in fear of their very lives – for their faith was often forbidden – in fear not just of ridicule or apathy, but real persecution. So to sing out in the dark to sing out in the midst of fear meant everything as it should do for us.

Rejoice heavenly powers I sang on your behalf and continued What good would life have been for us had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

This celebration is everything. What good indeed would there be without the dying and rising of Jesus? The Resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Given the torment of sin and suffering in the world and certainty of our death, what would the world be without a God who knows it shares it fully in his humanity who has risen from the dead?

This is the defeat of fear and suffering of death. The death of Jesus saves because he heals the wounds of sin, defeats the power of evil, and overcomes suffering – not by avoiding them but facing them with the eternal truth of love.

We must all ask: What does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to me? Ideas and thoughts won't suffice they won't allow us to cry and sing out like our forebears – there must be real difference. Acceptance of the risen Lord Jesus changed everything for the first witnesses – what of us?

We have thought this week about service and sacrifice – about what it means when we are told at the end of mass go in peace to love and serve the Lord. We have also tried to follow Jesus's final journey to the cross and in his footsteps plant our own and the experiences of our world today. Our journeys are different, They can seem as we have thought sometimes circular we often end up where we have started but with a new wisdom a new light to guide the next journey.

Jesus being risen from the dead and alive in a glorified and eternal way, changes and renews our awareness of daily and contemporary life not a detached spiritual one.

Wherever we are in life's journey there is hope to be found in the person and the life of Jesus. We might think of those first witnesses to the resurrection and how they were changed – they were not changed by just turning up at the empty tomb – they went through their own journeys to get there. Peter, James, Andrew and John for example prior to meeting Jesus were fishermen who worked hard for themselves and family. They lived daily with oppression authority, the grind of daily life, threat of poverty and premature death by accident or disease was always close by. Good Jews they held faith in God and the promise of a coming Messiah. They got on with life and waited in faith.

The coming of Jesus changed everything and not how they had imagined or perhaps wanted. Unknown nobodies became giants not because of what they did but who they followed believed and shared with others. Their pattern can be ours for this mass says hope is to be found today in our wounded and changing world. Our singing in the dark that he is risen builds hope against all that discourages us. Our hope grows directly from the Lord's rising from the dead. The dying and rising of Jesus transforms fear into the hope of mercy, forgiveness, and the promise of life after death.

Initially the disciples go back to their lives perhaps like us. Worldly concerns and personal needs constantly press in upon. How do we sustain hope? How do we share the hope of risen life in Christ.

One thing surely we have taken from the readings and passion stories of holy is the intensity of Jesus's relationship with ordinary people. We are called to be in relationship, not disconnected or in isolation. Our first relationship as with the first commandment is with God in prayer and worship. This changes our second relationship with the self and thirdly with others – Jesus's summary of the other commandments – to love neighbour as self. Relationship for the Christian always has these three dimensions. They get broken and distorted but despite any hardship we suffer, the love of Christ is constant and secure. Sin is forgiven, mistakes are used to learn and new life is possible for all who seek it.

These are not one off actions and events but journeys. Our relationship with God and our true self are made real and secure in the truth and the victory of the Risen Lord who stills bears his scars. We all have sufferings and hurts in this life. We all bear the distress of a dark and sinful world. In the Resurrection of Jesus, our hope is confirmed in the surpassing Light that will overcome every darkness. The victory is won.

It is Christ's victory in which we share and now we are called to share it for it is not for our own sakes alone but for the sake of the whole world. We cant fetch the whole world but like Mary or Andrew we can call those closest to us. But first we can only do so, like the first witnesses to the resurrection, if we are alive in our relationship with God and our true self. Rejoice heavenly powers this is the night that is made so. Life is good because Christ has come and he is alive.

The Revd Fr. David Wylie RN

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