

HOMILY FOR EASTER DAY  
21 APRIL 2019

On behalf of Fr Abbot and the monastic community I welcome you all most gladly to this Mass of Easter Day and I wish to you, your families and your friends all the blessings of this holy Paschal season. I thank you all most gratefully for being here with us, for joining in our celebration and for entering with joyful and loving hearts into the wonder of the Lord's resurrection. This is the day which the Lord has made; we rejoice in it and are glad. Alleluia!

In today's first reading we heard St Peter preaching the Resurrection of the Lord from St Luke's book of the Acts of the Apostles. He proclaimed that Jesus was killed by being hanged on a tree: 'yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people, but only by witnesses God had chosen beforehand'. Then Peter adds 'Now we are those witnesses – we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead'.

Then in the Gospel, though there are as yet in the passage we heard no resurrection appearances, we do hear of those who will be these first witnesses. There is Mary Magdalen; according to St John's Gospel she is the first to go to the tomb and find it empty and she will be the first to meet the risen Lord, mistaking him at first for the gardener. There is St Peter who is the next to go into the tomb and there is 'the other disciple, the one Jesus loved', understandably taken to be St John and the author of the Gospel but left unnamed. Perhaps this is so that we too, the hearers of his Gospel, may the more easily associate ourselves with him, who are also disciples who, despite all our faults and failings, our half-heartedness and backslidings, are disciples who the Lord loves.

It is said of him that on surveying the scene of the empty tomb, with only the linen cloths which had wrapped the body of Jesus lying on the ground, that he 'saw and believed'. He saw and believed that Jesus was truly risen from the dead. He saw and believed with a 'faith-eye' that Jesus was truly risen from the dead, and it is only by this 'faith-eye' that we in our turn can see and believe. To return to Peter in the first reading: he did not appear to all the people but only to certain witnesses and 'We are those witnesses'.

Now there was a discussion among medieval theologians about whether the chief priests and Pilate and the people who shouted 'Crucify' would have been able to see him if he had appeared to them and the majority view, as found for example in

Aquinas, was that they would not. Immediately this might make us think and worry that they were suggesting that the resurrection was merely a subjective experience, a piece of wish fulfilment. But no. They did not doubt that Jesus was raised bodily from death in his true humanity, but to see and recognize and acknowledge him requires the activation of the 'faith-eye'.

This is why Mary Magdalen thought at first he was the gardener and the disciples travelling to Emmaus did not recognize him until the breaking of the bread; his humanity was transformed into a new spiritual level of being, a breakthrough into this world of ours of the new heaven and the new earth. This is why he came and went through locked doors and appeared at will and disappeared, no longer bound in our world of space and time. Like those first Easter disciples we too seek to acquire this 'faith-eye' to see by insight this fleeting presence of the one who points us to the world to come, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of creation.

Still there is something no one saw, that we can only imagine and that is that first moment of resurrection, just as we await what we have not yet seen, the last day when all will be made new. But we have heard it sung, this moment of resurrection. It came unexpectedly, maybe even a little jarringly, after the joy and volume of singing 'Jesus Christ is risen today' in the entrance antiphon, which followed and accompanied the incensing of the altar.

This chant is an adaptation of, really just a small verbal tweaking, of words from Psalm 138. They are there in Latin on the first page of today's Mass booklet with the English translation on the following page. They acquire a new depth of meaning with the resurrection of Christ: 'Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum'. In the English 'I awake and I am still with you'. It could be Jesus speaking to us – 'behold I am with you always even to the end of time' when at last his appearing will be fully revealed to all, but it could also be Jesus speaking as Son to the Father; he to whom he prayed so intimately 'Abba Father' in his agony in the garden. Now he prays again to the one raising him from the dead: I awake and I am still with you, my loving Father'.

Maybe the music sounded anticlimactic after the hymn, it is mode 4, slow, low meditative, small range, minor tone. According to experts it dates perhaps from the 6<sup>th</sup> century; it is very intimate, and it suggests somehow a hidden source of energy. The king is coming awake, and he sings to his Father and to us 'Still I am with you'. It is a low slow pulse that can open our faith-eye, if we but listen to it in the deep silence of our hearts.

It was put thus in our second reading this morning from St Paul's letter to the Colossians, and we can take it now as speaking to us Christians: 'Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you too will be revealed in all your glory with him'. Even now in the frame of this life your faith-eye can see and your faith-ear can hear, even if but fleetingly, him who says I awake and still I am with you.