

EASTER VIGIL – 2022

Only God knows what happened in the tomb between Good Friday and Easter morning. The women who went there both found something and didn't find something in the garden. They found the stone had been rolled away and didn't find a body. Seeing the empty tomb they didn't know what to think, but angels reminded them that Jesus had told them he would be raised again on the third day, "And they remembered his words" (Lk 24:8).

The women returned to the other disciples and told them what had happened and not unsurprisingly the others found their words difficult to believe. Even so, Peter went to check for himself and only saw the grave cloths. St Luke is telling us that Jesus didn't suddenly revive and escape from the tomb. Grave robbers would not have left the grave cloths behind. The tomb was empty, but in itself that does not prove that Jesus is risen any more than an empty cross does. The first disciples were convinced of Jesus' resurrection when they saw and recognised him. The resurrection only becomes reality for us when we recognise the presence of the risen Christ in our lives. The Church's liturgy of the Vigil of Easter uses the symbols of light, water and a new song as signs of Christ's presence in our lives.

The Jews considered the Torah to be God's light for the world and for humanity. God separates light from darkness, good from evil. The Torah points out what is good and highlights God's truth. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the prophets so the Torah is also found in him. He is the light of the world and as the Paschal candle is carried into the darkened church, the darkness of Christ's death is dispersed. A candle can only give light by consuming its own wax – Christ's light only shines through those who are willing to let their self-centredness die.

We were first invited to do this at our baptism but it is a lifelong process, so the Church invites us in this Vigil Liturgy to renew our baptismal promises and be sprinkled with water. Water is necessary for life but it is also dangerous. In the book of Revelation we read that there will be no more sea, that means there will be no more death. Baptism is a type of dying and rising, a cleansing and the gift of new life. This new life is the presence of the Risen Christ in us.

The third symbol is to do with ourselves. In this liturgy we sing a new song, a song that was buried at Quinquagesima. That song is the Alleluia. As we heard in this evening's second reading, when the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea they sang a song to the Lord. Singing can be an expression of joy. We sing this Alleluia as the light of Christ enters the darkness. We sing this Alleluia as he enters our individual darkness.

Since the Resurrection of Jesus, the Church has battled the forces of evil who are intent on destroying us. Yet in the power of the Risen Christ we Catholic Christians still walk on the sea, we still walk through the fires of persecution and through the frozen wastes of being marginalised and cancelled. And we still sing the Lord's Alleluia as he holds our hand and leads us to himself. The Risen Christ is present in the Church's life and in our own individual lives. Recognise that presence and sing his song. Christ is Risen, Alleluia.

Msgr Harry Entwistle, April 2022