

Easter 2018

“After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” Unlike the male disciples, the women are present – just as they had been present as the Master breathed his last on the cross, and then, with Joseph of Arimathea, as he was laid in the tomb. Two women did not run away but remained steadfast. They came with grief in their hearts and bewilderment at what had happened. They also came with a focus – to bring spices for a proper burial – a step that had not been possible on the previous evening.

If we try to imagine this scene, we can see in the faces of those women any number of other faces: the faces of mothers and grandmothers, of children and young people who have suffered in so many conflicts or natural disasters. We see faces whose eyes speak of loneliness and abandonment - faces furrowed with tears. We can understand their emotions. We too have suffered wounds at various points in our lives, bereavement, disappointment, isolation, perhaps sickness or physical pain. We know what it is like to trust in God’s fidelity at one level but also to feel he is far from us – to walk in darkness.

“And suddenly there was a great earthquake” St Matthew tells us. They are shaken bodily – but also in spirit. When they arrive at the tomb the stone is rolled back – no body to be seen. An angelic messenger reassures them: *“Do not be afraid. He has been raised as he said!”* Imagine their astonishment! Can it really be true? He is alive! Their hopes have not been misplaced. This is the message that, generation after generation, this Holy Night passes on to us: *“Do not be afraid, brothers and sisters; he is risen as he said!”* In the days ahead we hear accounts of the various encounters the disciples have with the risen Lord, both in Jerusalem and in Galilee. This is not simply a retrospective of what a few people experienced 2000 years ago. Our Lord comes to meet us in our own day to bring us light and hope. We meet him in the breaking of bread at Mass as the two disciples did in their mysterious encounter on the road to Emmaus.

Our readings at the Vigil Mass remind us that all this is not an unexpected twist in events but rather the outcome of God’s plan unfolding through history bringing light into darkness. This plan is not yet complete. The resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost mark the opening of new chapters. The risen Lord lives in our hearts and we are to spread this message of hope throughout the world and to the end of time bringing light into all the dark places of our world and of human hearts.