

1. If I asked you now to tell me the story of Jesus' resurrection, I would get as many variations as there are people in the church, for so it is with any story which is passed on through the family or community. If you examine the four gospel accounts you will find discrepancies in the detail. Matthew's version (Matt. 28.1-10) has two Marys coming to the tomb in the early morning. Matthew alone adds the colourful explanation of an earthquake, and an angel rolling back the stone. He alone has guards posted at the tomb and so he alone tells us of their fear. But common to every account are two facts—the stone was rolled away from the entrance and there was no body! Luke's other gospel, The Acts of the Apostles, records only the fact that the apostles are witnesses to his resurrection (Acts 10.34-43). The most authentic witness is the existence and behaviour of the early Church who understood not only that Christ is risen but understood what this meant.—'you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God'. (Col. 3.1-4).

2. On the cross, Jesus identified with all humanity. On the cross, the sins of the world were put to death. We can imagine that we were put to death with him, and in us all the faults and behaviours and thoughts which kept us from being close to God. So if we died with Christ, we have also risen with Christ. In this sense every christian can regard him or herself as 'a newborn'. In Christ's death our sins are forgiven. In his resurrection we are raised to new life, a resurrected life.

3. So what does it mean to be raised with Christ? It is

- to be forgiven and know the joy of forgiveness and peace
- be a child of God (like Jesus), as close as Father and child, being able to speak to him and listen to him in prayer
- to belong to Christ and be part of his Body sharing his mission
- to have no fear that God will be with you forever through all the ups and downs of life and even in death

These are promises given to us in our Baptism into Christ, into his death and resurrection. Seek the forgiveness, the closeness, the joy, the peace and the freedom you have to bring Christ's peace and joy and light to others. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

1. The healing of the blind man (John 9.1-41) for the evangelist is a sign of Christ's purpose. "He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him". "I am the light of the world". The method of healing, washing the mud from his eyes in the pool, suggests a connection with baptism. Paul, speaking to the baptised in Ephesus, (Ephesians 5.8-14) tells them that 'now in the Lord you are light'. So just as Christ is the light of the world, we too, through being made one with him in baptism, are also called to be light. In this season of Lent we prepare to renew our baptism vows at Easter, hearing again the command to shine as a light in the world.

2. Paul enjoins the Ephesians, and us today as we hear his words, 'to live as children of light' and so there is an ethical dimension to this idea. Be involved with all that is good and right and true. Find out what is pleasing to God. Expose things which are of darkness.

3. "Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord" -this involves hearing his basic commandment to love God and our neighbours as ourselves. Bringing love into a situation of darkness then will be an action of light: careful listening and giving hope to someone in suffering or despair, a helping hand to someone stressed and burdened, a tender word to someone whom others reject; a non-judgmental acceptance of someone different from yourself—all these are actions which lighten the darkness of a person overshadowed with burdens of some kind.

4. "Expose unfruitful works of darkness." A good example of this is the effort in the Diocese to train as many as possible in understanding child safe environments and reporting child abuse and neglect. Being aware of this dark side of our society and then being prepared to do something about the injustice done to children is a way of bringing Christ's light and truth into our communities. There are many other examples where we can work for justice and truth, bringing light to a world where too many live in darkness.

5. There's a children's chorus, "Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light/like a little candle burning in the night/in this world of darkness we must shine/you in your small corner and I in mine." There's truth in this song. Each of us is baptized, each of us has been illuminated with the light of Christ, each of us is commissioned to shine as a light in the world. This Lent you might like to discover the darkness in your small corner where you can bring some light.

1. "Breathe upon us with the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ" -the Prayer of the Day sums up the theme found in every one of today's readings. Sin and death are the names given to all those things which keep us from living abundant life, the full truly human lives which were intended for us. We may wish to deceive ourselves and say that we live free, light-filled abundant lives but deep within all of us may be something which is an impediment to freedom and potential. What is it that stops us loving others unconditionally, stops us using our talents to the full, stops us enjoying good relationships with others, makes us fearful of change, which holds us back? By ourselves we cannot loosen the bonds of darkness and death. Only when we recognise this can we pray today's prayer wholeheartedly and believe that it is only the power of God which will bring us to light and freedom and new life through the forgiveness of the things in the past and present which restrict us. Psalm 130 is poetry which expresses this well, moving from the individual 'I' to the collective 'we'.

2. How can we express what God can do for us? The Bible readings give us images, so much more powerful than words. The image of the dry bones and the promise of the Spirit to give new life is powerful. 'I am going to open your graves' says the Lord. How powerful then the story of Lazarus. Christ opened the grave and called forth the dead to life. "Unbind him, and let him go" are powerful words.

3. Paul sums the concepts up in Romans 8.6-11 and moves us into considering Christ's resurrection from the dead and the power he gives us through the Spirit to live lives which are freed from the bonds of sin and death. The absolution, 'pardon you and set you free from all your sins', may have become commonplace to us. Perhaps in your mind you might hear "Unbind me and let me go" so that the simplicity of the message might free you from that which binds you. Imagine the shroud being lifted from you, imagine the new breath filling your lungs. Picture yourself with the burst of new life where all burdens have been lifted, all restrictions taken away. Remember your Baptism, a dying to sin and resurrection to new life, and live today as one given new life.

1. "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 23). Perhaps many people today regard the crucifixion as foolishness. After all in popular literature and film it's the baddies who get killed. The killers are the triumphant ones. Others might say it's not foolishness, just meaningless. Others more temperate might see Jesus' death as a tragic ending to a good life. Many ask, 'why did Jesus have to die?' But Paul proclaims the crucifixion as the power and wisdom of God. Can we understand this in our culture?

2. Submitting to death was the culminating action of Jesus' life and ministry. In his humanity he identified completely with us. He came to live as one of us. He sought out the weak, sinful and needy. His supreme act of identification with less than perfect humanity was to submit to a shameful death, a death where sin itself was put to death on the cross, where 'he bore our sins and carried our sorrows' There, representing all humanity, Jesus died and sin was put to death. This was not the action of a vengeful punishing God, rather it was Jesus' complete offering of himself, a sacrifice so that the great glory of God could be revealed and humanity could be raised to new life with him, just as their sinful selves had been put to death in his death.

3. The early Christians found their answer to the question in Psalm 22. It describes the sufferings of a righteous person in language which anticipates the death of Jesus. The psalmist shows a profound understanding of the suffering of an innocent person and his feelings of desolation and being forsaken not only by other people but also by God. The despair in this poetry cuts to our heart. Yet this is not just a passion psalm but also a resurrection psalm for there is a pronouncement of vindication and a change of tone from doom to hope from verse 23. As we celebrate the death of Jesus, we look forward to the resurrection. Unlike Jesus' friends in Jerusalem on that Friday, we know the ending of the story. We know why Jesus had to die, for we know that in that death God was able to reveal his power over all sin and death and his love for us and all people. So today, we do not just mourn the death of Jesus, we celebrate his death for in it is the power and wisdom of God.

1. The celebrations today are the beginning of the Great Three Days of Easter, a celebration which moves from Jesus' last meal with his disciples, through his agony, arrest, trial and death to the great resurrection event.

2. Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples in a room prepared for them. The Passover is a great memorial of the saving act of God for his people in Egypt. As they celebrated (Ex. 12.14) they participated in the event. Jesus took this celebration and imbued it with new meaning. The actions of taking the bread and wine and sharing the food and drink were part of the Jewish festival, but Jesus invested them with new meaning for his disciples and the Church continues to do so. So Christ became our Passover. "Do this in remembrance of me" is more than just a memory or reminder. Like the Jews in the Passover, when we participate in the Eucharist, we participate in the saving event and die and are lifted up with him whose Body we share.

3. So the Eucharist has a 'vertical dimension', i.e. a movement from God to humanity in Christ and from humanity to God in Christ, but Jesus' actions on the night of the Last Supper, remind us there is a 'horizontal dimension' too, a movement among those who belong to Christ. The Gospel of John, in fact, stresses this dimension more than the other. First, the foot-washing graphically illustrates the humility and servanthood, love and care we should have one for another. Jesus confirms this with his action in sharing the cup and his words of instruction to love one another. This love is a love which requires self-denial, doing things for others for their good, not ours, a complete giving of oneself. This 'horizontal movement' requires us to be forgiving of one another, to accept with tolerance the differences we have, and to try to live in unity as brothers and sisters of Christ. We express it liturgically when we pass the peace in worship. We are ordered by Christ to live it in our daily life.

4. May this service begin your three day journey towards Easter, mindful of God's great love for us and mindful of Jesus new commandment to love each other in that same way - "love one another just as I have loved you".

17<sup>th</sup> April 2011

1. The Gospel of Matthew today presents us with a paradoxical view of Jesus, a view which is at the very heart of our Christian faith. We have listened to long portions of Scripture, we have been confronted with moving images and words and mixed emotions. Let us try to sort them out.

2. Matthew helps us to see the royalty of Christ and paradoxically exhibiting itself in humility. In the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is the king coming to his people, the Son of David. Jesus comes as the last of the prophets, and more than a prophet. He comes not to tell of the future kingdom, but comes as the king himself. Death on the cross is the culmination of God's reaching out in Jesus to save his people. The naming of Jesus as King is underlined in the scene with Pilate (27.11-26), in the mockery of the soldiers (27.27-31) and the bystanders (v.42).

3. In completely different mood, the humiliation of Jesus is in his treatment and most movingly in those authentic words from the cross in Aramaic and translated for us, the words foreshadowed in Psalm 22. Jesus' obedience, even to the point of death (Phil. 2. 8) becomes horribly real in Jesus' anguished cry. For his obedience required him to put himself completely on the side of sinners. In his ministry Jesus associated with sinners and outcasts so that he could save them. On the cross, he represents all those who were separated from God, all who have sinned, all people. 'He bore our sins'. Jesus, who knew what it was to be one with the Father, felt in great anguish what it meant to be separated. Jesus is not just an ordinary man dying a horrible death. For God, he endured this suffering. For humanity he endured this suffering. Only by identifying with sin and alienation from God can sin be put to death and new life made possible.

4. "In your mercy, enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection" is our prayer today. May we, through Jesus put to death all which keeps us alienated from God so that we may also share in his resurrection to new life.