

Easter Sunday



Easter is the great Christian feast that marks the culmination of Holy Week and it begins a period when resurrection stories, which are found in all the gospels, come to the fore.

There are stories of the disciples on the road to Emmaus being joined by a stranger and some kind of recognition dawning in the breaking of bread...

There is Thomas in the upper room being invited to believe...

There is breakfast on the shore of Lake Tiberius and in the sharing of food some connection is made...

In the Easter Sunday gospel itself we find Mary of Magdala going to the tomb, followed later by Peter and John. There is a sense of newness in the air...

All these stories are characterised by a dawning awareness of a presence and a promise. We are being presented with a sense of something more to life. Yet these stories show that this 'something more' is to be found, not elsewhere but right here, right now. The stories are based in the ordinary everyday situations of the lives of those who had gathered around Jesus during his lifetime. And at the heart of this presence and promise in the ordinary we find a 'reason for the hope that is within us'.

So what is this hope that these stories seem to offer?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as the bringer of life:

'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.'

Often however when we think of the life being offered here we think only of some kind of eternal life to be found elsewhere. Our focus can be on the death and resurrection of Jesus, associating the hope that he brings almost exclusively with eternal life or life after death, however we understand that.

And yet the gospels, including the resurrection stories, present us with a Jesus concerned with the quality of life here and now – with the quality of life for the stranger and outcast, the beggar, those affected by some disability or other, with the way women were treated, with the relationships of power and influence in the society of his day, with the breaking and sharing of bread today. Into the 'here and now' he wished to bring about the kingdom of God – a kingdom which, we are told, is about justice and peace for all. That, it would seem, was central to the idea of 'life to the full' for Jesus.

It would seem then that the manner of his death, the idea of resurrection, the hope that this time brings is part of the whole fabric of his life. We cannot forget that he lived among us as part of this earth in his time and that the way that he lived so inspired his followers – those around him and many down through the ages that they wanted his memory to live on. The 'Do this in memory of me' that we say at the Eucharist each time we celebrate it is as much about the quality of his life as it is about his death.

We are remembering so that we might be inspired to live 'our lives as fully and as well as he lived his.' Irenaeus, one of the early Church writers described the glory of God as the person fully alive. God's glory shines forth, when life here and now is lived fully and allowed to do so. The Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt talked of emphasising a respect for and fostering of 'natality', of being born, rather than a mortality leading to some afterlife elsewhere. That is surely the basic gift of Jesus which contains the hope that he promises. It is also within each of us, as in the life of Jesus, that this hope resides.

Today we are realising in a new way that this 'each of us' must come to mean life in all its forms, as Aquinas in the 13th century reminded us, when he talked of the single and undifferentiated goodness of God – God's glory as it were – being refracted into myriad hues of being. The glory of God shines through creation in all its diversity.

In our catholic tradition we hold a very strong sacramental aspect where what we might call ordinary things like fire and water and oil are associated with what we call the holy. They are used especially over the Holy Week ceremonies.

But these 'outward signs' as we traditionally refer to them are *precious in themselves and not just in terms of their use value*—they are an intimate part of the fabric of life itself. They are life-giving gifts – gifts of the earth itself. The life-giving quality of water for instance is something we are becoming aware of in this part of the world as water pollution is becoming more and more a reality. In other places the need for fresh clean water is a daily struggle and a very real problem. Many believe that water will be the main focus of the next global wars.

The life that Jesus has promised then is not just in the future but concerns the here and now. It is the precious gift of life itself given to us through the ordinary gifts of water that quenches thirst, oil that soothes, food that nourishes, fire that heats... and through which we can recognise the presence and promise – the hope that resurrection means.

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