**EASTER SUNDAY**

**17th April 2022**

The Easter readings are so flexible that it is impossible to know in advance which will be heard! At the same time the ones for Mass during the day are the same every year. Therefore I have simply repeated the notes for 2020, slightly amplified. From next week, we shall confine ourselves to Year C.

**First Reading Acts of the Apostles 10:34 and 37-43**

In Acts Luke is concerned with showing the progress of the Good News throughout the whole world (1:8). As a Gentile, he is especially interested in the shift from Jews to Gentiles and the progress of the Gentile mission.

Our reading is part of Peter’s message to the Roman centurion, Cornelius. It gives an outline of the ministry of Jesus, ending with testimony to his recent resurrection. Note that the emphasis is on the appearances of Jesus. The tomb must have been empty, but it was not mentioned in the light of the more positive experience of the risen Lord.

Readings from Luke’s sequel, the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ are used from now to Pentecost because they describe the life of the Church which immediately followed the Resurrection of Jesus.

The speeches of the Acts of the Apostles are not a reporter’s transcription of the actual words said on each occasion. They are, rather, the gist of the earliest preaching. This example has three points that are typical of the euphoric mood of the disciples in the first few weeks.

The earthly ministry of Jesus, culminating in his death, met with Israel's rejection of salvation. The word "tree" echoes the disreputable nature of Christ's death: The closest experience that the Old Testament had to crucifixion was Deuteronomy 21;23 which says "Cursed is he who hangs on a tree" and it is thought that it originally referred to suicide.

Christ's resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus and all that he had stood for, in face of his contemporaries' rejection of it. This contrast between Good Friday and Easter Day is characteristic of the earliest thinking. Also early is the link between the forgiveness of sins and “all who believe in the name of Jesus” which was a synonym for the congregations of Christians.

It is also made explicit that the apostles have witnessed the events from the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, 2-3 years earlier, right through to the post-resurrection appearances.

**Responsorial Psalm: 117:1-2, 16-17, 22-23**

Very early on this Psalm 117 was used of Christ because of the words ‘*the Lord raised me up*’ and the reference to the rejected stone now used for a prominent and structural part of the building. (*In some Bibles it is called Psalm 118 because Psalm 9 is sometimes counted as two psalms*)

**Second Reading Colossians 3:1-4**

The Colossian Christians would have been baptized by total immersion, thus dramatically enacting death and resurrection far more realistically than we can achieve with our bird baths. It symbolically drowned and restored to life the new Christian. It is this idea behind Paul’s words in our reading this morning.

According to the author, baptism is to share Christ's death and resurrection, symbolized by the ritual of being 'plunged' into water (2:12). This real sharing in Christ's death and resurrection has profound and far-reaching repercussions in the Christian's present moral life. It entails the rejection of all that is 'earthly' (3:2-5), that is, all that is opposed to God. It calls for the pursuit of the 'good life'- not by the world's standards but as the good life has been lived by Jesus. Here we have the reality of Christian freedom. Though by one's sacramental death in baptism the Christian is liberated from past constraints, one is, nevertheless, bound to lead a new life that conforms to the gospel.

**Alternative Second Reading 1 Corinthians 5:6-8**

Paul here finds a spiritual lesson in the preparation a Jewish housewife would make for the Passover. This is the earliest reference (circa 57 AD) we have to the Christian recasting of the Jewish feast. But the off-hand way in which it is mentioned means that it was already commonly understood.

Paul was concerned with a case of immorality in the Corinthian Church. He argues that one immoral person, like yeast within a lump of dough, affects the whole community. We know this, only too well from recent years, how we are all affected by the depraved conduct of a few clergy. The damage it does is not only that suffered by the personal victims but also to those associated with the guilty and the work of the Gospel generally.

**John 20:1-9**

In the first reading we saw that the earliest preaching of the Resurrection relied on testifying to sightings of the risen Lord. They did not appeal to the empty tomb though it was only yards away. But John’s Gospel was for a second generation.

Jerusalem was a pile of rubble and off limits when mention of the empty tomb begins to creep into the tradition. The fourth Gospel was published circa. 90 AD or twenty years after the levelling of the city. But the site of the tomb must have been remembered for in 130 AD Hadrian deliberately built a Temple for Jupiter on it specifically to destroy a Christian holy place. It certainly did that, but incidentally preserved the location which is occupied to-day by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

John wrote his Gospel for converts who were unfamiliar with the places mentioned but for whom the leading characters were renowned. Of these, Mary Magdalene was the first witness, deliberately breaking with all Jewish antipathy of women witnesses.

The "disciple whom Jesus loved" was the next and his anonymity enables the reader to enter the story for himself alongside the legendary Simon Peter whose crucifixion had validated his witness. Peter had certainly seen but still had not yet cottoned on.

Mary Magdalene had seen the stone rolled away but assumed that the body had been removed. John's Gospel allows the "anonymous disciple" to come to faith in the resurrection simply through the sight of the empty tomb, without any angelic proclamation, as in the other Gospels.

The empty tomb thus functions as a sign for all three. But a sign’s success depends on the viewer. It leaves open alternative possibilities: either the body was somehow removed, or Jesus has been raised from the dead. All three saw, but the first to understand was the one who related most closely to John’s readership.

At Mary Magdalene's disturbing news (v. 2) Peter and *'the other disciple'* hurry to the tomb. Peter's companion is unnamed. John has introduced him as the Beloved Disciple and his coming to faith might enhance the significance of the empty tomb for later converts. The burial cloths and, more puzzlingly, their detailed arrangement, are a sign that Mary's understanding of what had happened (20:2) is not the correct one.

Jesus has not been 'taken' anywhere. Rather, he has left mortality behind him. Only the Beloved Disciple (v. 2) seeing the sign, understands - 'he saw and believed' (v. 8).

The one disciple with the best link to later generations has come to faith on the evidence of the empty tomb, before any appearance of the risen Christ himself.

The fact of the matter is that while the 'beloved disciple' could have been a real person and the source of John's tradition, he also represents the Christian disciple of every generation who is sensitive, in faith and love, to the presence of the risen Jesus.

What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus? The early confession: *'God raised Jesus from the dead*' implies more, much more, than simple reanimation. It implies that the kingdom of God - the rule of God - is indeed come in Jesus.

The resurrection should not be regarded as an isolated historical event. In declaring *'Christ is risen*' one is acknowledging that God's saving promises have been accomplished in Jesus. Jesus had seen his whole life and his whole mission in relation to the fulfilment of such promises: *'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*' (Luke 24:21). It was because of their former hope in him that the disciples were able to interpret the resurrection as God's confirmation of all that Jesus stood for.

Because he was raised from the dead, Jesus holds decisive significance for us. Because of his resurrection we know that meaningless death - and meaningless life – have now been given meaning. Jesus had died with the cry on his lips: *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (Mark 15:34). The sequel was to show that God had never forsaken Jesus and will not forsake us.

It is subjective and unrepresentative, but I notice that those who mention deceased relatives invariably assume them to be in heaven while they glance upwards. Their relatives are always looking ‘down’ overseeing our daily routines with interest. This naïve view hardly begins to understand what John means us to believe.

From the dawning of his sense of vocation to his lying in the tomb, Jesus’ life encompassed both his death and his teaching. So his resurrection vindicated everything he said and did. For one thing, it demonstrates the strength of Jesus' union with his Father, which death could not break. His resurrection demonstrates that his Father is indeed the God of humanity and holds out, to all of us, the promise that life includes and transcends death.

The resurrection of Jesus is not only something that happened to him then; it embraces us now. And not only as it concerns our future but also our present and past. Already, as risen Lord, Jesus himself is alongside us in our feeble efforts to live as subjects of the Kingdom.