

## A Sermon for the Easter Vigil

Tonight we reach the end of our great journey. It started on Thursday evening with our recalling the Institution of the Eucharist; it continued with the solemn commemoration of Jesus' death upon the Cross on Good Friday; and tonight we joyfully proclaim Jesus' resurrection.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb. When they arrive they see an extraordinary sight. First, they see the angel sitting on the stone that had covered the entrance to the tomb. Typically, the angel is reassuring; telling the women to look into the tomb and see its emptiness. "Do not be afraid", they are told. Even the guards who had been placed there by the authorities to secure the tomb shake with fear at the sight of it all.

But the women are brave. They listen, and they look. They receive the message from the angel - "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him".

Entrusted with this news from the angel, the two women leave the tomb and begin to make their way back to the other disciples, ready to share their news. I can picture them wondering what on earth this all meant, but trusting in the angel's words and message, and knowing its importance, they rush off to do as they were instructed. But first ... they meet Jesus himself.

He greets the women, and they fall to the ground and touch his feet. I imagine they were overcome with joy and excitement at seeing Jesus alive once more. Touching him would have been the proof they needed, and comforting beyond imagining.

And then he personally commissions them. He says to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

With those words, they become the prophets of the Easter gospel. They are the first to realise that Jesus is resurrected, and they are specifically told to go and share that news. It is because of them, and their faithfulness to their task, that we gather tonight to celebrate and to revel in their proclamation, "Christ is risen!"

They are also charged with giving the disciples their instruction to go to Galilee. They are to move from Jerusalem and continue on their way. Jesus does not call

them back to the tomb, but tells them to meet him in Galilee, where they will have a powerful encounter by the sea.

From this we see that the events of Easter dawn is only the beginning of this new stage of the Christian story. From this we emerge as people of great hope and rejoicing, knowing the depth of God's love for humanity, and that Jesus' rising from the dead was a victory and reassures us that our own death is a return to the God who knows and loves us, and not a journey into oblivion or nothingness.

As St Paul wrote in the letter to the Romans, "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The phrase I find so joyful, and worth exploring, is the notion of 'living to God'. As Easter people, we are called to 'live to God'. Each of us will have a different sense of just how this works in our own lives and circumstances, but these things are true for all of us:

It means responding to the love God has for us and for all people. It means being someone of faith and hope, who looks for the good in all and everything, and will stand up for what is good and right when they have the opportunity. It means being someone who uses their time, their talent and their ability in the service of others and of God. It means being as compassionate as Christ was to his disciples, and empathetic in our words and actions. It means speaking truth to power, being willing to advocate for the powerless, and not accepting the status quo for its own sake. It is not always easy, in fact sometimes it is challenging and outright difficult, but we have the greatest example to look to when we need reassurance - Jesus Christ.

This Easter, let us embrace the call to live to God, each and every day. May God be with us on our journey, and may Christ encourage and guide us, and may the Holy Spirit inspire us in all we do.

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