

EASTER HOPE AND EASTER COMMITMENT

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When my father died rather suddenly, my mother wrote that she was devastated and that her life would never be and could never be the same again. All of us, facing the death of someone we dearly love, face a horrible and indescribable loss, along with feelings of absence and emptiness. One sometimes hears grieving people say: "I'm simply gutted."

For some persons, their feelings of loss are so great that they actually deny what has happened. They think they hear the footsteps of their loved one on the path outside and that they hear their loved one turning the key in the door. Sometimes their denial takes the form of searching for their loved one around the house or in the cemetery.

When Mary Magdalene goes to visit the tomb of Jesus (Jn 20:1), it is very early on Sunday, the first day of the week. It is still dark but there is enough light to see that the stone has already been moved from the entrance to the tomb. But she is not in any kind of denial. She expects to come face to face with death. Not for a moment does she tell herself that Jesus is no longer dead. Surely persons unknown have stolen and hidden his body, and will not let him rest in peace.

She talks to Simon Peter and the anonymous Beloved Disciple about her experience (Jn 20:2). Together they race to the tomb. When Peter enters the tomb, he sees at first only the burial clothes. But when 'the disciple Jesus loved' enters the tomb he sees more. He sees what faith sees. Jesus is not dead but alive. Perhaps he has figured out that if people had stolen the body they would not have taken the trouble to take off the burial clothes and roll them up. More likely, it's simply his belief in the greatness, goodness and uniqueness of Jesus that leaves him convinced that God would not and could not leave him for dead. In any case we are told simply that "he saw and he believed" (Jn 20:9).

What we are celebrating in the resurrection, then, is first of all the power of God's liberating love for his dear Son. His resurrection is God the Father's answer to those wicked men who murdered Jesus on the cross, and expected him to stay dead and buried forever.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God raised and revived every story Jesus told, every truth Jesus taught, every value Jesus stood for, every choice Jesus made, and every purpose he pursued. Everything about him and his history was given new life, new meaning, new importance, and new relevance.

So the resurrection of Jesus is not an hysterical invention by people who refused to accept the death of their Leader. After all, his first followers were simply not expecting it. So much so that when they caught sight of him alive again they were gobsmacked and dumbfounded. They could hardly believe their eyes and ears. But they had to accept the plain fact that there was Jesus, raised in his body, alive and well before their very eyes, and that this had all happened through the unbounded power of God's love for his Son.

What we are also celebrating is our resurrection from the dead, our resurrection from deadly deeds, or at least our resurrection from anything less than the best, the most honest, the most transparent, the most authentic, the most generous, and the most loving ways of living our lives. We are recognising, in fact, that not only is Jesus Christ alive now in himself, but he is also alive in us. He is living in us through the presence, power and action of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' second self. So much so that Jesus of Nazareth in the flesh was the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. But since his resurrection, his presence in the world takes the form of the Holy Spirit living in the church community. This is so true that we may speak of the Holy Spirit as the very life and soul of the Church.

So today and all through the fifty days of Easter we respond to the power of the Holy Spirit among us by renewing our baptismal promises and renewing them sincerely and enthusiastically. We reject darkness, evil and sin in every shape and form. We promise to follow Jesus in a life of light, goodness and love, a life shaped by his own shining example. It is through the Spirit, coming from our Risen Lord, that you and I can hope and even expect to live like him, speak like him, act like him, love like him, die like him, and rise like him.

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