

## Our tombs, His resurrection

Phew! It is such a relief to have got here. To Easter Day. You may feel the same if you've had your head down in the Lenten furrow these 40 odd days, or have kept an observant and serious Holy Week. It has been a slog.

It is a long time to have been mindful of the great and grave themes of the season: of the abuse of power, of denial, betrayal, suffering, humiliation, death and abandonment. And you don't have to have been on a strict fast or in uncompromising hair-shirt-mode to feel the relief and to welcome today's great feast.

So, as they say, *Christ is risen*, and all is well. Holy Week has reached its glorious beautiful conclusion, and now the sombre, grievous remembrances of Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday *change*, and the Church bids us celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The liturgy, having been on something of a forced diet throughout Lent, can now loosen its corsets and breathe in and out again and expand; colour has returned; and from this day until Pentecost – rather the liturgical equivalent of Pavlov's dogs - we play responsorial ping-pong with that ancient affirmation: *Alleluia. Christ is Risen/He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

I have no wish to stand in the way of a good party, but this sudden change in gear can be pretty awkward and – in its awkwardness – not entirely satisfactory. I have been wondering why.

It can't be because I myself am not much of a party-person (I have always taken Jesus' words about when 'two or three are gathered together' not so much as a minimum number but as an advisory on a desirable upper threshold of group size...). No. I wonder if the reason why the 'let rip', 'in your face' enthusiasms of the Church's claims of the Resurrection might prove a little difficult for some of us sometime is perhaps *because of our lack of experience*. Experience, that is, of resurrection.

The Incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas involves something we can identify with - a new born child and all that arrives with them; and the Crucifixion (- we speak very often of 'unimaginable suffering' but the problem I think is that we can, to some considerable degree *imagine* suffering -) the Crucifixion is something we can pitifully and experientially identify with also. And, it should be noted, many of us crucify ourselves in numerous ways. *But Resurrection?* What real knowledge have we of that?

After the birth of the child Jesus in the Christmas narratives and the later suffering, abandoned betrayed crucified Jesus whom we know how to pity and whom we may have come to love, arrives the *triumphant risen Lord* (for that is how the church presents him: just think of the words of the hymns we have this morning).

Having had a shared vocabulary that helps us walk with him first as new-born and later as our brother *in this world*, in his

resurrection we suddenly find ourselves with no easy reference points. No doubt this partly explains the various accounts of incredulity or dumb stupidity in the Gospels. Key players are wrong-footed, cross-eyed; they can't recognise their late teacher. Not even when he appears before them.

Let's stay with this line of thought: recognition; not seeing what's in front of us. If identifying with Christ's resurrection is difficult for some of us, for the kind of reasons I have mentioned, are any other routes open to us for celebrating this great Feast? More important than that, are there ways we can live the claims of the Resurrection *in this life*?

My first suggestion is that we let it disturb us. I suspect that most Christians think it their duty on Easter Day and in its season to feel happy. To be 'elated'.

Why not, instead, allow yourself to be disturbed. "*To disturb: to break up a settled state; to interrupt; to intrude upon; to inconvenience; to put out of order; to disarrange*". We narrowly define 'disturb' when we think it spells only trouble. Disturbance can also liberate.

A second suggestion is to ask *if we ourselves haven't got stuck in the tomb, and left behind*. Christ, we are told, is no longer there. He's gone. But we might still be in there.

We're very often accomplished tomb-builders. We build them from the inside. Stone by stone. We rarely know this about ourselves though we can be quite good at spotting it in others. We think what we are doing is building a life: certainties, possessions, popularities, praises, reputations, CVs.

We may see these as making ourselves safe – and on one level some of them might (I suppose). But the risks are great. And if we're not careful these things become a windowless tomb with us inside. It is by no means an exaggeration to note that some people are physically alive but in virtually all other respects dead – morally, spiritually, imaginatively, emotionally, creatively, *humanly* - dead. And some such people can be very charismatic. Watch out!

These then are the risks of shutting ourselves off from God; a God who meets us in *our* flesh, suffers with us in *our* crucifixions and who incomprehensively leaps ahead of and beyond us *in his resurrection* - and who bids us follow him.

*For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.* (Luke 9:24). Familiar words. And we don't always reckon with them.

Today is the greatest feast in the life of the Church. Let's enjoy it, celebrate it, let's play that responsorial ping-pong with real feeling, receive the sacrament of the Eucharist as though for the first time, be *unmeasured* in our thanks for what God in Christ has done and does for us.

*And*, when we next have some quiet place and private time, let each consider the tomb or tombs we have skilfully built for our own occupation; those in our minds and hearts which we have constructed (we think) to protect us but which, if we are not careful, simply entomb and suffocate our precious life: the life for which Christ died; the life for which we believe him to have done something astonishing and decisive about - and to - death.

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia.** Amen.

Hugh Valentine