

EASTER VIGIL/EASTER SUNDAY YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020

NEW LIFE SPRINGS FORTH

Mt 28.1-19.42 Is 52.13-52 Heb 4.14-5.9 Also: "Jesus is Alive" from The Rhyme Bible.

Welcome to all, as we move from the tragedy and the triumph of the Jesus story, in this strange time for our whole global village of humanity, into which he came and immersed himself in the fullness of human life, and now we celebrate his return to the Father and his ongoing presence with us.

The Easter story reflects images of new life, growth, hope, as it morphed into an appropriation or hijacking, and even pinching the name of the pagan festival of Oestre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, the east, resurrection and rebirth, remembering that our timing of Easter is determined by the phases of the moon (*we had a big yellow moon the other night!*), unlike Christmas and our birthdays, going by fixed dates. The symbolism is more than apt, as in northern climes, this is springtime, as new life bursts forth in the world around us, although our seasons are in reverse, and we have so many evergreens, with all the eucalypts in our native environment.

Nevertheless, we can get the picture in our imagination, as we reflect, with a little more time on our hands at present, on the wonder and beauty of nature, as I pondered and took photos for putting on Facebook, on my long and permissible exercise walk last Monday! Easter eggs, bunnies and bilbies, even Paschal chocolate lambs, continue the theme of new life and productiveness, as further secular symbols of our Christian feast, and nothing's wrong with that, as long as we don't overindulge in the chocolate, and clean our teeth (*not that I'm one to talk there!*)

As we again gather in the virtual presence of each other, we come to the climax of our Easter celebrations, reflecting on the experience of the faithful women, who provide continuity from the foot of the Cross now journeying in sorrow and mourning to the tomb of the dead Jesus, only to find it somehow empty. The tragedy and injustice of Good Friday overshadows their intrepid daring, to come out to be present at the tomb, something the apostles and other disciples don't even seem to have considered, shattered and petrified as they were after what had happened to the just and good man, Jesus, who called them his friends, and who had offered them so much hope and promise of a better future for them and for all.

Reminiscent of Christmas echoed again, the angel as messenger, speaks of news of great joy, this time, with the mantra that **"He is not here, he is risen."** What does this mean? A few weeks ago we had the story of Lazarus coming forth from the tomb, but to resume his normal earthly life and relationships, until he has to face his mortality once more in the future. This time it is something different, more mysterious, irreversible and transformative, as the Risen

Jesus is not the man he used to be! In some Gospel accounts, the women don't recognize him at first, as they take time to come to terms with his new reality, but that that it is indeed he whom they knew and loved, before the recent devastating and traumatic events of his demise.

Normal human emotions of fear mixed with joy are hardly surprising, as they run to tell the other disciples of their experience of the encounter with Jesus, and so their realization that he is truly risen and present to them. The others have understandably escaped Jerusalem in fear of what might happen to them, and bitter disappointment after what they might have hoped for, with Jesus leading the way to a better life, perhaps even still thinking of future freedom from the Romans, but whatever hopes and delusions they might have had, these were surely dashed at the arrest, conviction, torture and crucifixion of Jesus.

We can't blame them for going into hiding of some sort, and they don't seem to have really understood, nor taken to heart, Jesus' earlier warnings about his cross and impending death, with theirs still to come in the more distant future! Yet, their encounter with the Risen Jesus transforms them and empowers them with new courage and conviction, as they do a rapid U-turn and head back to Jerusalem to proclaim their Easter faith, that ***“Jesus is alive. God has raised him”***. *“The conviction is unanimous and unassailable”*, says Spanish scripture scholar, Jose Pagola.

For all of us now, it could be seen as feeling a bit like being locked into a sort of tomb, waiting for the pandemic to pass and the restrictions to be lifted. Meanwhile, let's again make the most of our time, alone or as partners, friends or family, and perhaps further consider life's priorities, as we look towards a ***new normal*** at the end of all this angst and uncertainty, along with a bit of fear, doubt and wondering about the future.

And so, as we reflected on Good Friday, in John's Gospel, Jesus draws us to himself, even as he is lifted up, according to his promise. He moves beyond the horror and tragedy of the Cross to fullness of life with God, imaged as Father. This is not the end, a failure and tragedy in human terms, but the path to hope and new life in glory as we celebrate the new life of Easter joyfully, despite our own natural anxiety at the present strange time of the Coronavirus pandemic, as we live in hope that it will end sooner than later, but we just don't know.

As the wonderful book ***Old Turtle*** (by Douglas Wood) concludes, in a powerful parable about humanity, nature and the meaning of life on this planet, in this world: ***“And after a long, lonesome and scary time... the people listened, and began to hear... And to see God in one another... and in the beauty of all the Earth. And Old Turtle smiled. And so did God.”*** Thus is our mission in following the way of the Risen Jesus, sharing his peace and living his love.

A HAPPY EASTER TO ALL

john hannon

Easter

11th April 2020

