



Easter Sunday – the Resurrection of the Lord: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“The morning star who never sets.”**

The joy of the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter is nowhere better expressed than in the singing of the famous Exultet. The Exultet – named after its first word Exultet – Rejoice – is an ancient Hymn of Praise. An article from Ampleforth Abbey says: “It seems to have its origin in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries in the churches of Spain, Italy and France, and was only slowly adopted in the Church of Rome.” The text we use today has been written between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It is a long prayer of Blessing sung, when possible by a Deacon at the Easter Vigil, and in the modern Roman Rite it is called the “Praelonium Paschale” – the Easter Proclamation. The long sung prayer recounts the wonders of the saving work of Christ, whose new and risen light, shining in the darkness, the Paschal Candle represents. The Exultet concludes before the Paschal Candle: “May this flame be found still burning by the morning star: the one morning star who never sets, Christ your Son, who coming back from death’s domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity and lives and reigns for ever and ever.”

I thought of the refugees from the war in Ukraine whose testimony is a witness to fear, trauma and pain which is being healed by the love and Faith of people like the Ukrainian Catholic Community here, who are joined by so many others, including people of no Faith in leading the refugees through the desert with the light and hope of Christ at their head. The Paschal Candle which stands lit in every Church for the next 50 days is a testimony to Christ Risen and with us in the journey of life. No darkness can overcome the light that the Risen Christ brings into our lives. The Exultet “is a lyrical outpouring of praise and thanks” writes Father Clifford Howell, the well-known Scholar of Liturgy, it is “intended to make the people feel that Christ is in very deed their glorious and risen Lord who conquered death and hell and opened for them the gates of heaven.” It is a hymn to the Risen Christ symbolized by the burning Paschal Candle.

I am reminded of the Homily written by Father Brendan McGuire for Easter Sunday in which he takes us beyond the Cross to the empty tomb and the centrality of this in the Gospel of St John which we read on Easter Day. He writes “Every year thousands of people go on Pilgrimage climbing a mountain in the Italian Alps, passing the ‘stations of the cross’ to stand at a large wooden crucifix depicting the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus. One year, a pilgrim noticed a little trail that led beyond the Cross. She fought through the overgrown and unused trail, and to her surprise, came upon another shrine, a shrine that symbolized the empty tomb. It was neglected. The bush had grown up and around it. Almost everyone had gone as far as the cross, but there they stopped.”

In life we can be overwhelmed by the Cross: suffering, pain, mental anguish, evil around us. The Gospel of Easter Day leads us to remember the full story. There is something beyond the Cross. There is the empty tomb: it points to the Resurrection of Christ Jesus.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

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The disciples came to realise this when they met Jesus Risen, as St Peter testifies in the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles on Easter Sunday where he is recorded as saying “I and those with me can witness to everything he did...and also that they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet three days afterwards God raised him to new life and allowed him to be seen...by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand...now, we are those witnesses.”

When we celebrate the Eucharist on Easter Sunday, and over the 50 days of Eastertide, we give praise and thanks for His presence with us. May we witness to this by becoming Christ for others, particularly those who find it difficult to move beyond the Cross.

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