



Easter Sunday 9 April 2023

Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Lord is truly risen, Alleluia”

A friend’s memorial card has these words from Brian Bobbyer, a famous all-round sportsman who died in 2011: “Mystery is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be enjoyed.” There is no greater mystery than the Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead. And yet, its truth is set out clearly for us in the accounts of the empty tomb on Easter Day and the Appearances of Jesus which are recounted in the Scriptures in the weeks ahead. The Apostles and the wider group of Disciples saw the unexpected and do their utmost to communicate that to us both orally and in writing.

Loyola Press produces a weekly guide to the Gospel reading entitled “Sunday Connection”. For Easter Sunday of the Resurrection, it has this background to the Gospel of St John 20:1-9:

“Today we begin the Easter Season, our 50-day meditation on the mystery of Christ's Resurrection. Our Gospel today tells us about the disciples' discovery of the empty tomb. It concludes by telling us that they did not yet understand that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thus, the details provided are not necessarily meant to offer proof of the Resurrection. The details invite us to reflect upon a most amazing gift, that is faith in Jesus and his Resurrection.

Each of the four Gospels tells us that Jesus' empty tomb was first discovered by women. This is notable because in first-century Jewish society women could not serve as legal witnesses. In the case of John's Gospel, the only woman attending the tomb is Mary of Magdala. Unlike the Synoptic accounts, John's Gospel does not describe an appearance of angels at the tomb. Instead, Mary is simply said to have observed that the stone that had sealed the tomb had been moved, and she runs to alert Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. Her statement to them is telling. She assumes that Jesus' body has been removed, perhaps stolen. She does not consider that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Simon Peter and the beloved disciple race to the tomb, presumably to verify Mary's report. The beloved disciple arrives first but does not enter the tomb until after Simon Peter. This detail paints a vivid picture, as does the detail provided about the burial cloths. Some scholars believe that the presence of the burial cloths in the tomb offers evidence to the listener that Jesus' body had not been stolen (it is understood that grave robbers would have taken the burial cloths together with the body).

The Gospel passage concludes, however, that even having seen the empty tomb and the burial cloths, the disciples do not yet understand about the Resurrection. In the passage that follows, Mary of Magdala meets Jesus but mistakes him for the gardener. In the weeks ahead, the Gospel readings from our liturgy will show us how the disciples came to believe in Jesus' Resurrection through his appearances to them. Our Easter faith is based on their

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



witness to both the empty tomb and their continuing relationship with Jesus—in his appearances and in his gift of the Holy Spirit.”

A.N.Wilson, an author and critic in an article today writes “

“As a younger man I lost my faith, but now I see that Christianity is a bulwark against the liberal elite who believe only in the modish creed of the day.

This Easter weekend, we come to the story's extraordinary ending, the discovery by some women friends of Jesus that his tomb was empty. And we read of the reactions of the disciples — fearful, incredulous, but eventually believing that, as millions of Christians will proclaim tomorrow morning: "The Lord is risen indeed!"

To believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead — that is the Easter faith.

Yet today in Britain, such faith is the subject of sneers and derision. The powerful majority of liberal elite opinion is not merely dismissive of the truth of the Gospels, it is violently, viscerally, opposed to Christianity.

When I was younger, I succumbed to the relentless anti-Christian bombardment of our secular society. Like many who lost faith, I felt anger with myself for having been conned by the Christian story. I began to rail against Christianity and wrote a book, entitled Jesus, which endeavoured to establish that He had been no more than a failed prophet.

But after about ten years of accepting secularism, I returned to a belief in Christianity. And every year that passes, my faith becomes simpler and clearer. I fail to live up to the teachings of Christ in innumerable ways, but the truth of it is not in doubt.

Graham Greene, one of the greatest novelists of the 20th century, worked as a sub-editor on a newspaper to earn his bread- and-butter money. It was while doing this job, he used to say, that he became convinced of the truth of the Resurrection.

For him, the most convincing of the stories was of two men, utterly disillusioned and terrified, walking to a village near Jerusalem a few days after the Crucifixion. They had hoped that Jesus would be the Messiah, come to redeem Israel, and now their hopes were in ruins.

As they walked along, they were joined by a stranger, who fell into conversation with them. They turned in, because the sun was going down, and invited the stranger to have supper with them. As he sat with them at the table and broke bread, they realised it was the risen Jesus.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Easter confronts us with a historical event set in time. We are faced with a story of an empty tomb, of a small group of men and women who were at one stage hiding for their lives and at the next were brave enough to face the full judicial persecution of the Roman Empire and proclaim their belief in a risen Christ.

The Resurrection, which proclaims that matter and spirit are mysteriously conjoined, is the ultimate key to who we are. It confronts us with an extraordinarily haunting truth.

One of the strongest arguments in favour of Christianity is that it transforms individual lives — the lives of the men and women with whom you mingle on a daily basis, the man, woman or child sitting next to you in church tomorrow morning.

Resurrection is not simply an historical event. It is a lived experience. He who died is made known in the Breaking of Bread.”

As I write this Reflection for the Vigil this evening and for Easter Sunday morning, it is Holy Saturday, and my mind turns to yesterday, Good Friday, and the Commemoration of the Passion of the Lord, which I celebrated at Our Lady and St Michael in Shipston-on-Stour. I had some pictures of the ceremony to post on Facebook and I wrote this to go with them: “A welcoming, happy congregation.” It was great to see parents bringing their children and young people along to experience this special time. Like A.N.Wilson, they may go away, but I am sure they will return when events in life lead them to face the deepest questions, especially the ultimate one re life after death.

“Christ has risen Alleluia”

This Easter Day we are blessed with Holy Water, a reminder of the Baptism through which we are made one with Him and the whole Church Community.

“Christ has risen Alleluia”

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese