

## Living the Word

### Psalm 118.1-2 & 14-24

This is a psalm of celebration, for a great day of celebration. It begins with the steadfast love of God – ‘O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever’ (1). How is this love of God shown? Through the death and resurrection of his Son. Jesus Christ – despised and rejected, dying in disgrace on a Roman cross – has won the great victory over sin and death. For ‘the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes’ (22). Christ, having died, has now risen from the grave, and has opened to us his kingdom of eternal life. So what is to be our response, this Easter Day? ‘This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it’ (24). Rejoice and be glad – for death has been defeated, and even our own graves have become beds of hope.

## Saints & Heroes

### St Julius

There are saints for every day of the year, but other celebrations, such as today’s – the feast of feasts! – mean that those saints are often forgotten. On this day in 352, Pope Julius I died. He had been Pope since 6th February 337, and was notable for asserting the authority of the papacy over the Arian bishops of the East. Julius in fact had championed the orthodox faith over and against the Arians, supporting St Athanasius, their theological arch-enemy. Athanasius had been trying to solve the problem in his own rite in the East, but was reminded (corrected?) by Julius and told that he should have written to the Pope first, so that the Pope could make a decisive decision. This reminds us, whether we are Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, or Protestants, the Pope, as the successor of St Peter, has an essential role in maintaining the faith and unity of the church. Amongst his other achievements, it was Julius who set the date of Christmas to 25th December. People postulate all sorts of reasons for this, many suggesting that this was to supplant a popular Roman festival, Saturnalia. Benedict XVI has commented on this, however, putting to rest this idea – have a read of his very-accessible *Spirit of the Liturgy* for more information.

## The Empty Tomb



During Holy Week our church buildings serve as different stage settings for the liturgical re-enactment of the Holy Week story. On Palm Sunday, we paved the streets of Jerusalem with palm branches to greet the Lord; on Maundy Thursday, we were in the Upper Room with the disciples and processed with the Lord to the Garden of Gethsemane and kept vigil with him at the altar of repose. On Good Friday, we moved from Pilate’s Palace to Golgotha and witnessed the crucifixion of Christ. During the Easter Vigil the church building served as the tomb to which Mary Magdalene came early in the morning. Now, filled with light and beauty, the church rejoices at the Lord’s resurrection and reflects the radiance of the heavenly Jerusalem, anticipated in the empty tomb. Jesus said: ‘I will not drink from this fruit of the vine... until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom (Matthew 26.29). Today, as we celebrate the Eucharist over the empty tomb we participate in the heavenly banquet of the Kingdom of God.

### O Sing Unto the Lord

One of the most beloved Easter hymns, *The Day of Resurrection* (NEH 117), is a translation by John Mason Neale (1818-66) of a text by St John Damascene. The three verses made up Ode I of the ‘Canon for Easter Day’, and was sung first at midnight on Easter Eve. With his enthusiasm for the glories of the Eastern Church, Neale quoted a description of the service he attended: ‘At midnight, a cannon was fired, then the old Archbishop elevating the cross exclaimed in a loud exulting tone, “Christos anesti, Christ is risen!” and instantly every single individual took up the cry, and the vast multitude broke through and dispelled for ever the intense and mournful silence which they had maintained so long, with one spontaneous shout of indescribable joy and triumph, “Christ is risen!” “Christ is risen!”’