

HOLY SATURDAY: EASTER VIGIL

As the clocks haven't gone forward yet, we can't be late for the Resurrection! Tonight's Liturgy can be done as the sun rises but I have never found that to be a 'winner' amongst parishioners – but I have to say, that an early morning cooked breakfast is something of a treat - if you want to try that next year? I know a good B & B very close to here!

I also know it is good to be gathered here because we want to re-enact the Church's historic celebration of the Light of Christ: not only conquering death but **confirming** his promise of rising again. Those first women to arrive at the tomb were still grieving, still in funeral mode and they were too fearful to remember what Jesus said would happen.

The last few days had been something of an earthquake for them, shattering their hopes of anything good to come out of Calvary. But all our readings tonight tell us something powerful about God at work in and through his creation, and in and through His acts of redemptive love and sacrifice. Salvation is costly, the waiting is costly, but tonight we remember, we recall, that salvation emerged from that tomb as if secretly, quietly and unnoticed. The Son has risen; it is a different dawn, a different colour that streaks the sky, the colour of resurrection.

The Exsultet, our 'Easter Song of Praise' (sung so beautifully by James) dates back to the very first centuries of Christian believing and belonging. Despite all the wounds and divisions of the world then, as now, Easter is the time to stand up and

sing in solidarity, even noisily: “**THIS IS THE NIGHT** when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness. This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.”

Only last night we saw on our TV news that very moving torchlight Good Friday procession made by Palestinian Christians in the narrow streets of East Jerusalem. Seeing those armed Israeli soldiers watching close by, and despite the bustle, despite the threat of disruption, how meaningful and courageous that prayerful procession really was, by our suffering Christian brothers and sisters. They weren't going to hide away but instead, stand up and be counted, and in a city which jostles three different faiths, that takes some doing when you consider our own nation's apathy with even occasional church attendance. It is as if we are living in post-Christian times and even what we are doing tonight is felt by most to be quirky or irrelevant.

Well, I am not going to go there! Tonight is just the beginning of an unfolding, inspiring Easter Season when, Sunday by Sunday, we reflect on a different Resurrection appearance or scene when again, we are invited into the drama, and invited to encounter the Risen Christ in our midst. We must embrace whole-heartedly through symbolism, signs, Word and Sacrament, what it is God is purposefully saying to us - and the kind of Easter people He longs to shape and nurture, encourage and grow – through us.

In this simple prayer by Fr Andrew Nunn, there is always hope for a new and faithful Church in the present, as well as the future, for our villages as well as our towns, because the Church is all about people like you and me, called to be willing, faithful bearers of Christ's light, wanting our lamps to shine out and His still voice, to be heard and shared:

“Risen Lord,

Make yourself known,

Stay in the shadows no longer,

Meet us with

Resurrection life.”

Amen.