

## **EASTER 3 (2026)**

I have never managed to do what St Peter did! According to our first reading from Acts, there was some serious oratory going on and as usual, those first apostles responded tentatively to what he was saying. These earliest of times after the Resurrection of Christ were unsettling to say the least, but Peter 'the Rock' stays firmly on solid ground, extolling the importance of baptism, our identification with Christ's own dying and rising; our belonging to him. We are told in a very matter-of-fact way that those who welcomed Peter's message were all baptised there and then – a mighty 3,000 people were added to the Parish Registers!

Perhaps the reason for this sudden and dramatic wave of enthusiasm was because the likes of Peter had such a fresh and wonderful experience of seeing his beloved and Risen Lord once more. He couldn't bottle this up for himself alone. He had to pass on and remind everyone who would listen, of what Jesus had promised, his words and actions, the meaning of his life and death, if you will. This was no traditional obituary but something much more radical. Those of you who have read our new Bishop's Easter message, will recall her words, about 'passing the baton on', telling our nearest and dearest or those we do not know, that the Good News of Easter has to be shared, if it is to be embraced with some energy as well as enthusiasm.

The Bishop does not explain how we do this anymore than St Peter does! But I like this image of a relay race which not only

depends upon speed but good team work – none of which can be effective without dedicated training and rehearsing. We see this not only in the world of sport & athletics, but also in the world of music; we see it in the world of medicine and research; we see it in physics and so much more, as we witnessed recently by the crew on board ‘Artemis 2’ – to the moon and back!

That sense of elation, satisfaction even, in knowing that death is not our destiny but new, abundant life instead. It is that communal reaching out we have to experience and do, before the ‘Alleluias’ can ring out, and before history can be re-made. This is surely why we can pray in today’s collect:

**“Fill your church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open.”**

That’s the Emmaus ‘never-to be- forgotten’ experience of our Lord joining us on this way, sharing our pilgrimage, being our teacher and guide. His Risen presence with us is kept alive for all time - in the sacramental breaking of bread - around the one, communal table of fellowship. In this imaginary stadium of spectators watching a race, we become instead participants, reliving the events of the last supper, recalling who is the Host doing the inviting. Who is the host encouraging us to do the same? How can any Church, as the Body of Christ, be anything else but inclusive?

Yes, we have rites of passage like Baptism and Confirmation and we also have many and varied resources for training and formation. That is something we always need to be doing and

helping to grow. Yes, of course, it sometimes feels that every Diocese has yet another initiative or drive to increase our numbers, a bit like St Peter did before 'what's app' or 'Facebook' was invented! But rather than beating ourselves up at what we have failed to do, or so-called targets we have missed – remember that we are not a Building Society or a Bank! We are pilgrims on a journey with a living Christ as our companion and friend. He may well say that we are slow to learn or too fearful to take more risks – all parents and grandparents will identify with that sentiment concerning their own offspring.

But “there’s the rub”, as Shakespeare did say. Today’s Gospel story is frustrating for the reader as it also comes as something of a relief. The disciples are not quick off the mark; they would be hopeless in any relay! But perhaps what unites all these different images or stories of the Resurrection is the deepest felt and most memorable of all questions: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?”

If you have not been on a retreat or on a pilgrimage for a long time, I would encourage you to have a go, to take that leap of faith – whether it is Walsingham, or Iona, or whether it is Lourdes (where my 80 year old sister-in law has just returned with a group of special needs and sick children). It doesn't really matter where, as much as why. And I believe strongly that the invitation and sharing of our faith with others has to be intentional - as it also has to be sensitively passed on. It may be 'fake news' to ascribe this statement to St Francis but

the message still rings true: “Preach the Gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words.”