

by
Didymus

(No Evensong)

As I have explained before, Easter, like the Nativity, is when every priest seeks an altar and a pulpit, for these are the major events in the Christian faith for everyone. With larger congregations Licensed Lay Ministers (formerly Readers) become servers and chalice bearers. I remember one occasion at Easter when the church was crowded, we had two patens (bread) and two chalices. A conversation in the vestry established the version of the stately gavotte that the two pairs would do to avoid unseemly collisions, omissions or horror of horrors a spillage of wine.

One of the first communicants was a man with a baby and toddler. I turned to the priest, questioningly, as giving a blessing was a priestly privilege. He whispered “*Then bless them, Peter*”. So I did, as a prayer, since in my book only one being gives blessings and we know who. The number of children was amazing, most rather stunned at learning that Jesus was their friend who was always with them. It made Easter for me, an experience that remains with me.

It is a pity that there is no Compline before Easter now, nor an Evensong, both of which are quiet and reflective. But perhaps the weight of Easter roast lamb et al is too much for a second service. I took an Easter Evensong once, as a visiting retired diocesan bishop had asked for one. Dear John May joked that I was “his” bishop of Porthilly, and so there would now be two bishops at the service.

Over the years I have grown more critical of Easter. It is a time of heartbreak and of hope for the future. Yes, of course it is important, without doubt. But do we really understand our Lord’s mind? I wonder. The church does rather love sin and guilt, and never more so than in a good grovelling requiem that piles it on. Verdi, for example, in his *Dies Irae* (*Days of wrath*):-

Ingemisco tamquam reus, culpa rubet vultus meus; supplicanti parce, deus.

(I groan as one who is guilty, my face blushes with guilt; spare the supplicant, O God.)

As Genesis proposes, we are fragile and susceptible, tempted to evil and yet open to good. But God knows that. He created us. If he wanted perfection he could create it. He knows when we get it wrong, and no doubt groans; he knows we suffer or cause suffering, and weeps. We must sincerely acknowledge our faults and regret them, but surely there is a limit to the self-flagellation of Lent and Easter? What happened to our Lord was barbaric and we should never forget his sacrifice. However Easter is not just a requiem for Jesus Christ, no more than is the weekly Eucharist. It is not just an atonement for us as we are. It is far, far more than that.



Jesus was conceived so that he could lead, minister and teach, but ultimately he would give his life to prove one great truth. That great truth was the creation of new life, revealed in his Resurrection. The words of St. John, (Ch.3 vv16-7) tell us just that.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.



At Easter we will remember the moment when Mary Magdalene realised who she had met in the garden by the tomb, the voice she knew so well. The moment when the Disciples, hidden away behind locked doors, found Jesus among them. The astonishment of Cleopas and his friend at Emmaus on the breaking of bread. And later when my pseudonym sank to his knees and said “*My Lord and my God*”. Jesus had been raised from death, moving from humanity to a new life beyond death. That was the objective. That is what we must celebrate.

That is what Easter should mean to us.

PRAYERS

In our prayers we must thank God for all that he has given us, and for us. We give thanks for his love, his mercy, and the gift of new life, bringing hope. It is all around us, with trees and flowers, and beautiful children like the triplets born in Liverpool, published by The Times. While praying for our families and friends, we must give thanks for the healing received.

Our thanks are due to the medical professions for all that they do for us. There is so much to pray for in the world, with poverty, disasters, hunger and thirst, disease and pain, without starting to think about the terrorism, persecution, racism, and outright warfare, and with the brutalising effects on people.

I have included a photo below also published by The Times, of Vladislav Naumets, aged 6, who



lived with his family in Bucha, near Kyiv in Ukraine. I am sorry that the picture quality is not good. He has lost his mother, Marina, who died of a heart attack during the Russian bombing. Her home-made grave is in their garden. It is absolutely heartbreaking and reduced me to tears. May God bless him and his family, and may Jesus be always at their sides.



Amen