

**Easter Sunday & Low Sunday (2<sup>nd</sup> Sun of Easter): Evil & Doubt defeated.**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Easter Day: Acts 10:34+37-43; Low Sunday: Acts 4:32-35;**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Easter Day: Colossian 3:1-4; Low Sunday: 1 John 5:1-6;**

**Gospel: Easter Day: John 20:1-9; Low Sunday: John 20:19-31.**

**Gaudia Paschalia!! – Traditional Latin greeting - Happy Easter!!**

Here are two sermons in one – the parish office is closed in Easter week, so I shall try to weave both sets of readings into this one homily. This year, our world seems confused, thanks to wars, economic problems (some left-over from Covid) and our own amazingly wet spell of weather the past six months. If you read the texts mentioned above, you will notice that the Apostles were also confused, when faced with the idea that Jesus was alive after Good Friday. In the Easter-day gospel (John 20:9), it is said of Peter & the “beloved Disciple” (John himself) at the empty tomb: *“Till this moment, they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”* To say they were nonplussed is putting it mildly!

But why were they ‘nonplussed’? Here are 3 possible reasons. First, most Jews at the time did not believe in any meaningfully conscious life after death – only the Pharisees really accepted it. Second, Jesus’ death had been a grisly (and very public) Roman execution, leaving everyone traumatized. Third, their own behaviour at the time of Jesus’ arrest had been fairly cowardly: Peter, scared of a servant girl, had denied knowing Jesus three times. At the empty tomb, John *“saw and he believed”* – an intuition that the only explanation for the empty tomb & body-cloths was that Jesus was alive. Peter was much slower to think that. Other gospels show that he took some convincing; in fact, all four show that most disciples were initially reluctant to believe that Jesus was alive.

We shall now turn to the gospel for Low Sunday next weekend. (If you have a post-1970 missal, or a Bible, I recommend you read this.) This is one of the most famous stories: that of ‘Doubting’ Thomas. He had not been with the others when Jesus had appeared on Easter Sunday evening (when he more-or-less convinced them that he was alive). Thomas flatly refused to believe them – unless he could put his finger into the nail-holes, and his fist into the spear-hole on Jesus’ body. This was an insult as well as a challenge. One week later – the evening of Low Sunday – he was with them. The risen Jesus appeared to them and offered Thomas the chance to prove he was really alive. Thomas’ reply was the famous short prayer: *“(You are) My Lord and my God”* - he not only

accepted that Jesus was alive, but also that he was divine, and deserved to be worshipped. However, Jesus' reply in return was not what you might have expected: *"You believe because you have seen me, BUT blessed are those who have not seen, yet still believe"* – that means us. Jesus contrasts Thomas' 'faith' (helped by sight) with that of the millions who would not be able to see the risen Christ physically. I find this one of the most consoling sentences in the Bible.

There are times when most Christians must have doubts about the resurrection – after all, humanly speaking, it's an improbable idea on which to base an entire religion:- hideous failure, followed by a very unlikely miracle. Yet we know that it defied all attempts to disprove it at the time - if anyone could have demolished it, St Paul, that notorious Christian-baiter before his conversion, would have done so. He so loathed everything to do with the early Christian preaching of the risen Jesus, that he tried violently to stamp it out. So I find it amazing that Paul, now a Christian, writes in the Easter Day 2<sup>nd</sup> reading:- *"...You have been brought back to true life with Christ....you have 'died' (to sin, in baptism) and now the life you have is hidden, with Christ in God."*

For St Paul, the resurrection was not merely another chapter in the life-story of Jesus: it was a history-changing moment, when God's creative force caused the dead Jesus to rise to eternal glory. With him, all human beings, past, present and future, have eternal life too. Jesus' death & resurrection are outside our history, so we can feel their effect here and now, 2,000 years later. To God, everything is "now", as he is beyond time, so the effects of Jesus' sacrifice and new life are always happening, always new. This is how our sacraments operate – in them, we are somehow caught-up in God's eternal life and work.

One last point: of all the people involved with Jesus before his execution, the one who somehow experienced the risen Jesus first was Mary Magdalen. Either alone, or with others, she had gone to the empty tomb and, while there, Jesus appeared to her. In one way, she stands for you and me. The risen Christ is not just for senior Church clergy; anyone with faith can meet him in prayer. After this long, very damp winter, I suggest that's the spiritual tonic we all need. I wish all of you who read this, your families & friends, every Easter blessing.

*Fr Jim Dunne.*