

Friday (Angela of Foligno, 1502)

When you put a hot iron in the fire it assumes the very shape and nature of the fire itself: heat, colour, strength influence, for it surrenders itself whole and entire, and not in part, yet it keeps its own substance. Just so, when the perfect fire of divine love joins the soul to God and unites with him. It casts itself into God. When it is changed into God without losing its own substance, its whole existence is altered. Then this love makes itself almost entirely Divine.

Scripture (Colossians 2:9-10,12)

In him in bodily form, lives divinity in all its fullness, and in him you, too, find your own fulfilment, in the one who is the head of every sovereign and ruling force. You have been buried with him by your baptism; by which, too, you have been raised up with him by your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

A personal invitation from Pope Francis

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.

No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.

If you would like to listen to a series of talks on the Resurrection by Fr. Tom Cullinan, please go to www.martin-bennett.com and click on 'resources'

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Easter Week

Risen, present among us – and still keen to work with us!

Each year, I find that the various stages of the Easter Vigil make it fairly easy to be prayerful and joyful. Judging by how soon my life returns to normal after the 'Easter break', I suspect that I am dealing with the Resurrection more as a 'happy ending' to the Easter weekend than being drawn into the mystery. Perhaps my starting point this year should be to place myself with the apostles when they hear the news from the women who had been to the tomb (Luke 22:14-23). Their confusion will, hopefully, give me sufficient pause for thought to stop me from being either too casual or too theoretical about the events which are at the heart of our faith. A problem with this could well be that, as the story unfolds, I might find I am much closer to the apostles' lack of belief than I might care to admit.

Perhaps I should stop trying to deny my human reaction in an attempt to 'be holy' and agree with the apostles: the women's story is nonsense. To try and make sense of it, i.e. to try and explain it at the level of the senses, I would have to reduce the resurrection to something that is within my understanding, whilst accepting it as non-sense leads me to turn to God and pray for the grace to understand. In so doing, I can be closer to the women at the tomb as they remember what Jesus had told them: not simply recalling what Jesus said but being drawn into a deeper understanding of what he said then but they couldn't possibly understand at the time.

The whole of the vigil service allows this prayerful remembering: moving from darkness to light with the proclamation of the joy of Easter; the readings which retrace and reveal God's promises, his actions, our infidelities and his forgiveness throughout history. In the final Old Testament reading, God promises that he will reveal the holiness of his name; he will put a 'new heart' into his people, so that (finally!) he will be at the centre of all they do.

Over the years this has meant different things to me, but I usually end up seeing Jesus as a good role model. How limited this is, if we listen to St. Paul and follow the Liturgy of Baptism. We don't follow in the footsteps: we become united. Through the resurrection, Jesus has removed all that divides us from him: sin (that which divides us from God and from each other) has been conquered. As I begin the Easter season, I must 'remember' my Baptism as the women remembered at the tomb.

I can respond to the Resurrection in three ways: reject it as nonsense, as do many people who regard only what can be proved or explained as 'real'; I can reject it in a more subtle way by viewing it as an historical event which happened to Jesus, viewing him as something of an exception to the human rule; or I can accept it as 'nonsense', leading me to turn to God to ask for the grace to live the new life.

At the tomb, the women were told to go and tell the apostles to meet Jesus in Galilee, i.e. 'back home', which suggests to me that the resurrection is about a new way of living my daily life. I often read the gospels as though Jesus is basically a good role model, but if I listen to St. Paul and follow the Liturgy of Baptism, we don't follow in Jesus' footsteps – we become united. Sin, (the fears and limits, the 'go it alone life which shuts out God, as seen in Holy Week and the Old Testament readings) has been conquered: we are united with the living God—now that does seem like powerful nonsense! I will need the whole of the Easter season to begin to live with this. Happy Easter. Martin Bennett

Monday (From the Easter Proclamation)

This is our Passover feast, when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain, whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers. 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. Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave, you gave away your son. The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy; it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride. Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and we are reconciled to God.

Scripture (Romans 6:3-11)

When we were baptised into Christ Jesus, we were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life; realising that our former self has been crucified with him, so that the self that belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Now, the life that he leads is life with God. In the same way you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Jesus Christ.

Tuesday (Cardinal Basil Hume.)

New life has been given to us. We received it first at Baptism. That life made St. Paul say 'I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.' Bold words but full of significance. We must not think of Christ rising from the dead and then leaving us to cope as best we can, to live as he taught us how. No, he remains with us, present always, unseen by the eyes and beyond the touch of the hand. Through our faith we come to realise more and more his presence within us and around us. Jesus Christ lives. We draw strength not from ourselves and our own resources but from faith and union with Jesus Christ.

Scripture (Ezekiel 36: 18-28)

The Lord says this: 'I am going to display the holiness of my name which you have profaned among the nations. And the nations will know that I am Yahweh when in you I display my holiness before their eyes. I shall pour clean water over you and you shall be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your filth and of all your foul idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you. I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you and make you keep my laws, and respect and practise my judgments.

Wednesday (Caryll Houselander)

I was in an underground train, a crowded train in which all sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging – workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw Christ in them all: living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them. I came out into the street and walked for a long time in the crowds. It was the same here, on every side, in every passer-by – Christ.

Scripture (Mt 28:5-10)

The angel said to the women "There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay, then go quickly and tell his disciples' He has risen from the dead and now he is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him!" Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples."

Thursday (Sheila Cassidy)

We rush about, examining the discarded shroud, looking behind the bushes, completely ignoring the patient angel who says 'Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive?' The rising of Christ in the Spirit and in whatever form his *new* body took, his descent among the dead and his harrowing of hell are central to our faith. Even more important, and for me totally breath-taking, is the image of the wedding of earth with heaven, the union of frail human beings with their immortal, unknowable God.

Scripture (Isaiah 54:7-10)

I did forsake you for a brief moment, but in great compassion I shall take you back. In a flood of anger, for a moment, I hid my face from you. But in everlasting love I have taken pity on you, says the Lord, your redeemer. So now I swear never to be angry with you and never to rebuke you again. For the mountains may depart, the hills be shaken, but my faithful love will never leave you and my covenant of peace with you will never be shaken.