

What will follow?

*God unlimited by mortal fear or tomb's cold grip: in the lingering dark give us grace to know your life triumphant, your love undimmed in the face of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead.
Amen*

Prayers for an inclusive church

Probably the most complicated lesson we need to learn in life is that all decisions have consequences, and that we have to take responsibility for our decisions and their consequences. This which would seem so simple, is in fact is very “not simple”. And I am not referring to work parties during lockdown, but that could be taken as an example. I am referring to the whole series of events that happen during what is known as Holy Week, with its culmination on Resurrection Day, and all that follows.

We have seen some of these consequences already: Maundy Thursday and the self-giving in bread and wine, the loneliness of the prayer in the garden when the disciples fall asleep; on the Friday, a political leader condemning an innocent person because he fears the truth; others situations are yet to develop, but they are there, and what we do about them in our current world, will also have consequences which involve us.

Jesus took responsibility for proclaiming the Kingdom of God as different from any other kingdom and was taken to the cross for this. He also took responsibility for the new community the world needed to know about and gave us the new covenant in the bread and the cup. God took responsibility for all this as the true way forward when, those who had spent years walking the way with Jesus went to attend to his (dead) body on the Sunday morning, only to find the stone of the tomb rolled away and the tomb empty.

Do we find any resonance for us today in this reading? YES, I'm sure of that. How many of us are like Mary Magdalen? We too begin “while it is still dark” and considering how John speaks about light and dark, this says a great deal. In John chapter 1 (which is often read round Advent time) we find “***the life is the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it***” (1; 4b-5). Mary goes out, not to meet the light but in darkness, and is going to the place of death, she is not expecting Resurrection, and encountering the open tomb she runs to Peter and the other disciples. Her message is “*they have taken the Lord from the tomb*” and this triggers a race to the tomb... Does Mary describe our very human approach to this day? Probably in more ways than one.

Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb and all they see are the wrappings, and finally enter the tomb and only when they have seen do they believe, but don't understand; what did they see? What do we see? For there is nothing to be seen except emptiness. And what an anti-climax follows in the reading: they returned to their homes, as if nothing had happened.

But the story continues...

Mary still stands there, in a corner, weeping, and she peeps in and sees two angels. I wonder why she is the one to see the angels? probably because she stayed there! They ask her the obvious question: *who are you looking for?* And they get the obvious response – for the Lord. Sometimes our journey of faith is based on the simplest of response. And when she turns round, she sees somebody, but did not know whom. It is only when this “unknown” calls her by name: **Mary**, does she recognise. She can’t hold on to him as she would like to but is instructed clearly: *don’t stay here BUT go and say....* And that is what she does, she is the to say: **“I have seen the Lord, and he told me...”**. Following the initial sentence of this reading today – Mary has gone from darkness to light, and she certainly takes on the responsibility of the situation, as none other has done so far: She shares the good news that transforms the world.

And here lies the key to the Resurrection – Jesus, now risen, transforms the disciples from a fearful and scattered group of confused people, into the witnesses of the new story. From a hurt group of people to a new community of believers... What we see here is how this first group of people, sad and afraid can now feel deep inside themselves the new presence that is life. Only then do feelings become concrete actions - they can share the news; this is when Resurrection goes from being simply a nice idea and becomes a living reality. And for us here and now, Resurrection leads us from an individualistic lifestyle to the reality of being part of a body, the community of all of us, everywhere – and we have to play our part.

This is what happens when we take responsibility of our faith and play our part – when Resurrection becomes a reality, and the consequences are the capacity for forgive others and ourselves, to connect with God and with the community of God’s children, who share this same feeling. This is how we go from darkness to sharing the light that cannot be put out, where the Christmas story and the Easter story as an explosion of hope, of newness, of possibilities.

The born in a manger, who soon becomes a refugee; the one who is judged and murdered; the one who resurrects and says **GO**...that is what challenges us. The question for us is how to we live this journey to the Resurrection and the consequences of this that follow? How are we taking responsibility of the message of hope, peace, reconciliation, and life? The response is – we do in communion, one with another, we do it by sharing, by learning together.

Here we stand, what will follow?