

And in your light we shall see light *Psalms 36 v 9*

We have just read as our Gospel from John's Gospel, chapter 20. Last Friday night we had those sombre words from John 19, as he presented his picture of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. On Good Friday we were left in darkness, Jesus dying on the cross, ridiculed by his enemies, deserted by all but a few of his friends. His body is deposited in a borrowed tomb. It seems to be the end. To his friends it is the end of a dream, their hopes, their dreams of God's kingdom breaking into the world. To his enemies it seemed to be the end, the end of a dangerous radical, a troublemaker, a heretic.

Our Gospel reading this morning begins in darkness. While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene makes her way to the tomb. Traditionally associated with the sinful woman who had washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, Mary's loss is particularly poignant. Before her meeting with Jesus, her life had been a mess, looked down on and despised by respectable society, Jesus had responded to her tears with words of forgiveness, words of acceptance, words of hope. What now lies ahead of her? And so under cover of darkness, she comes to the tomb to pay her respects to her master, her friend, to one who had redeemed her life from the mess of what had gone on before.

The Tomb is empty. Not content with killing him, his enemies had ransacked his grave. Distraught she runs back through the darkness to tell the disciples the news. They rush out past her to see for themselves. They saw, they believed but they did not understand and so they return to their place of hiding. Mary stays and we have that beautifully crafted account of her encounter with the risen Jesus as she hears him speak her name, gently, tenderly. Tears of sorrow turn to tears of joy as she rushes back to tell the disciples, not just that the tomb was empty but that she had seen the Lord. That is what is crucial

about the Easter story – not just the empty tomb. By itself that just added to their sense of loss and dismay. What changed Mary that first Easter morning was an encounter with Jesus, risen, greeting her, sending her back to the disciples.

This year, as I reflected on this passage, I found myself turning to the beginning of John's Gospel, to those words we read each Christmas:

What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. *John 1:3-5*

This is what we celebrate each Easter Day. Life, light triumphing over death and darkness. This is a reality not just for Jesus, not just for the disciples, for all people in all time. And so we read each Christmas day:

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, *John 1:12*

So what does this mean for us, living as we are in Dublin in 2016. Today in the city centre there are ceremonies to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising, events that lie at the heart of the history of this State. Tomorrow there are a series of events under the umbrella, Reflecting on the Rising, designed to encourage us not only to look to the events of the past but also to look forward into the future, what sort of Ireland, what sort of Republic do we see for our selves, our children and our grandchildren?

How do we reflect on the resurrection? This week I found myself doing a lot of reading. And I came across words I first heard years ago, from the book 'Strength to Love', a collection of sermons by the America Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King. King combined a passion for the Gospel with a passion for justice. He wrote

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

That is a message for our time. In a week that has seen horrendous carnage on the streets of Brussels by those who would claim to be men of faith but are instead men of darkness. Of course there have been calls by many who come with their own agendas, to erect barriers, to abdicate responsibilities for those fleeing for their lives. Now is the time for us, who this day celebrate the resurrection, the triumph of life, of light over death and darkness, to shine as lights in whatever situation we find ourselves, in our schools, in our places of work or recreation, in our communities. May we as a nation reaffirm our spiritual heritage. As in the not so distant past, Irish men and Irish women have known what it is to be strangers in a foreign land, to be misunderstood, so may we reach out in compassion and understanding to those who are different, to those who are in need.

I leave you with words of Jonathan Sacks, in his book 'Not in God's Name' a reflection on violence in the name of religion:

Hate makes us slaves; therefore let it go. Do not wage war on the children of darkness. Make sure instead that you and your children are sources of light.

May we be ones in whom and through whom the light of the risen Christ, the love of the risen Christ is shed abroad in the world of today.