

I remember one Easter when I was in Mountmellick going to visit a retired priest in hospital. We had established a friendship early in my time there. He had left Clonaslee (a village that formed part of my Parish) and spent his entire ministry in Birmingham, finishing up as Parish Priest of a Church not far from the part of Birmingham I came from. I had left Birmingham and found myself as Rector of the village of Clonaslee.

This was the first Easter Sunday since his ordination that he had not celebrated the Eucharist. In the course of our chat he came out with an expression that has stayed with me. 'We are,' he said, 'an Easter people.' I have often reflected upon that since. Today we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is a fellowship that is shaped, that has its very origins in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Resurrection is not just an event that happened to Jesus, it is an event that happened to his disciples .

I would often reflect on an Easter sermon delivered by the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, in which he declared that 'Easter was about a lot more than a conjuring trick with bones.' It was about the disciples experiencing the presence of the Risen Jesus. As our Gospel reading reminds us, the empty tomb by itself only heightened the confusion and despair of Mary Magdalene and the disciples. What transformed them was their experience of Jesus risen from the dead.

'We are, as Fr Foynes reminded me, 'an Easter people.'

As I just said, resurrection is not just something that happened to Jesus, it was something that happened to his disciples. What are we saying when we say that resurrection was something that happened to the disciples? First of all, the experience of resurrection, their meeting with the risen Jesus changed them, motivated them, empowered them to go and spread the Good news.

But there was more to it than that. The disciples came to understand the resurrection not just in terms of new life for Jesus but new life for them. Just as death no longer had ultimate power over Jesus, death no longer had ultimate power over them. In the resurrection new life is released into the world. For Paul, his own experience of encounter with the risen Christ meant nothing less than a new beginning. In writing to the Galatians he declares:

'I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I live now in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (*Gal 2: 19-20*)

This journey from death to life is the journey of a lifetime, a Journey of drawing closer to Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me. In a passage that I must confess is one of my favourites Paul writes to the Philippians:

'Not that I have already obtained all this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.'
(*Philippians 3:12-14*)

We are an Easter people, a people whose community and individual life is shaped by an ongoing encounter with the risen Christ.

Our Gospel reading closes with the Risen Jesus sending Mary Magdalene back to the disciples to share the news of the resurrection. She had gone once to the disciples with news of the Empty Tomb - she now returns with news of resurrection. That has been the primary purpose of the Church - to be a community with a message - 'Christ is risen'; to be the Body of Christ, a people through whom and in whom the risen Christ lives and acts in the world of today. We are called to live out those words of Teresa of Avila:

"He has no hands but ours ... He has no feet but ours .. ,

He has no lips but ours to speak his word in the world of today ... '

May we be truly an Easter people - showing something of the life and power of the risen Christ in the world of today.