

2019 RESURRECTION NIGHT

When someone who is precious to us dies, a black cloud envelops us. Maybe we can still smile, perhaps we can even laugh, but inside we feel hollow. We try to be brave but our hearts feel as if they have been wrenched asunder.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James had loved Jesus deeply. During those wonderful days in Galilee, when crowds had flocked to hear Jesus preaching, they had looked after Him and the Apostles- cooking, washing, sewing and caring for them with tender devotion. In the latter days when so many had come to reject Jesus, they had continued to stay close to Him and the Apostles, continuing their faithful service.

And now at the crack of dawn on Sunday morning they came to Jesus' tomb to offer Him one last service. They came with water and soap to wash His body which had been made filthy by the degradations of His cruel crucifixion. And then with spices, ointments and linen cloths they intended honouring Jesus' body with a proper burial.

Even though they were stricken with grief, there was work to be done. Life had to carry on. As always, they were practical in their love.

But when they arrived at the entrance to the tomb in which Jesus had been buried, the stone had been rolled away. And when they entered they saw to their horror that the body of Jesus was no longer there. But then two men in brilliant clothes- obviously angels- appeared before them and said those wondrous words; words the women would repeat thousands of times in the days to come as they told and retold their story: "He is not here. He has risen."

Scalded with joy, the woman rushed to first tell Peter and the Apostles; yelling out when they first saw them: "The Master is risen. He is alive."

Jesus, who had been executed; He whose heart had been pierced with a spear; He who had been manifestly dead; was risen. He was alive.

This news has echoed down through the centuries. It has been passed from one generation to the next. It is good news; beyond parallel in all of the history of the world- because it confirmed beyond all doubt that Jesus was God. Not only that- Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a sure promise of our own resurrection. The darkness, the hopelessness and the fear of death we can all feel has now been overturned by the sure promise that we have eternal life. We

are a people destined for rapture- destined to be caught up in God's love, for all eternity. Our hope is glorious.

This evening as the Easter flame was passed between you, a gentle light lit up your faith-filled faces. You are a people who know the meaning of suffering. You know, too, that one day you will die. But you are able to face suffering and death with serenity because of the surety which the resurrection of Jesus has given to you.

Shelley-Anne echoed our joy and the hope of the human race as she sang in the Exsultet: "Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour, radiant in the brightness of your King! Darkness has vanished forever! For this is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphantly from the grave. Christ has conquered! Be filled with God's glory!"

On this night Christians in the Eastern Church have the lovely custom of greeting each other with the words: 'Christ is risen' and replying 'Is risen indeed.'

And so I proclaim to you with joy: 'Christ is risen'!!

In a few minutes we will renew our Baptismal commitments. We will publicly proclaim that we are dead to Satan, to sin and to all evil and alive to life with God in Christ Jesus; echoing the words from St. Paul to the Romans we have just read: "When we were baptized, we were baptized into Jesus' death. We went into the tomb with Him and joined Him in His death. If in union with Jesus we have imitated His death, we know that we shall also imitate Him in His resurrection."

As we are sprinkled with baptismal water we will beg the Holy Spirit to come upon us just as He came upon us at our Baptisms and help us to be ever more faithful in our commitment to our dearest Saviour, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

May we be lights to our darkened world. May we be people outstanding in our hope and magnificent in the witness we give of the Risen Christ.

When people meet us may they sense that we are, in truth, alive in Christ. May they recognize through the witness of our love that- wondrously: "Christ is risen" "Is risen indeed."