

EASTER SUNDAY 2020. PRAYER BOOK & VIGIL EUCHARIST.

I often recall that first time i stood in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. To enter the Church was emotional in itself, given its holiness and its importance to the central aspects of our faith. To climb the steep steps and kneel at the site of the crucifixion, to touch the spot in the rock where our Lords cross was raised , to pray at the stone of anointing where Christ's body was laid in preparation for burial, and finally to join the queue to the tomb, the sepulchre itself where Christ was raised where all moments of deep and profoundest experience. I was going to the edicule, the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, situated inside a large rotunda and surmounted by a large cupola. It was hard to comprehend, and yet i knew it would be empty, adorned with lights and incense yes, but i knew that this is the place that our Lord rose from the dead. The words of the angels in Luke's resurrection narrative came to mind "why are you looking for the living among the dead?" And i suppose at that point my only answer echoed Mary Magdalene's desire when she went to the tomb.

She wanted the tangible to. Her concern in the dark of that first Easter morning was to seek the physical body of Jesus, the material, to see him, embrace him, to hold him. Thomas had the same response if you recall. "Unless i put my finger in the holes in his hands and side i will not believe." The world is full of those who require hard evidence, who are not content with just the effects but want to probe and prod the cause. Yes there is something about being close to those very things that witnessed moments of immense importance but the pitfall is then losing sight of what it is they are pointing towards. It is like pointing at the moon and only concentrating on your finger. Mary's inability to see the dead body of Jesus was problematic if that was all she could experience. Equally

when the memories fade and the photographs of the edicule fade then if the tangible, the evidence is so important then so will faith.

Again in that queue waiting to enter the edicule there were a number of people jostling and pushing in, eager to get to the tomb. They hardly had any patience. Cameras at the ready they wanted to get in there and the quicker the better; almost a bit like Peter. Peter, having been told by Mary Magdalene that the Lord had gone, raced to the tomb. Peter ran, and what we know about Peter isn't at all uncharacteristic. John tells us he dashed into the tomb, and surveying the scene he notices, well nothing very much; some discarded grave clothes. Nothing is said of what Peter made of all this. This is very much like those tourist type visitors to the tomb, very much like another category of people in our world. They have some interest for whatever reason, perhaps just curiosity and then move on to the next thing very quickly. There is no concept that the grave clothes are folded or that the tomb is empty and what that might signify.

And then finally, in that same queue, there were the devout, the quiet, and the contemplative. The old lady clutching and saying a decade on the rosary, the young man who once had an encounter with God and now wants to draw near to the spot of his salvation. The once wayward man who knows there is more to this life and the more can only be found in Jesus. These are very much like John; John who ran to the tomb with Peter and paused before entering; John the beloved disciple, who in life lay close to the heart of our Lord because he loved him so. It is this John who on entering the tomb, saw and believed. It was out of love for Jesus that he could see beyond the empty tomb, the sight of folded grave clothes and knew that his Lord had accomplished what he had promised in Life, that he had risen from the dead.

It was only John who saw and believed and he could only know because he loved Jesus with all his heart mind and soul. We cannot know the truth of the resurrection by clinging solely to the artefacts; they are just shadows of a much truer reality. The edicule in all its holiness wont prove it by itself, neither will enthusiasm. The seeking of evidence is not enough where the mystery of the resurrection is concerned. It is love; a love that is large and deep, a love that looks at the little pieces of evidence, the clues, and the pointers and puts them together with faith. It is then we will know the truth of what happened on that first Easter Sunday morning and spend our lives amongst the living, both now and life eternal.

AMEN