

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for Easter Day (Year A) 9th April 2023

In his programme 'Catholicism', Bishop Robert Barron gives a deceptively simple description of what the Church is. This is what he says:

"The Church is that society, that Mystical Body, in which people learn to see with the eyes of Christ and to walk the path that Christ walked."

The Church is a community of people who are travelling together on the path of learning to see the world with the eyes of Christ; we are each, for the moment, at different places on that road, but we are all of us on the same path. When you see the world as he sees it you will, inevitably, travel as he did. As his eyes looked with compassion on the sad, the sick, the lonely, and diverted him to go to their help, so will our eyes if we learn to see the world as he sees it. The eyes and the feet are linked together: what the eyes see will govern where the feet travel.

Today we hear one very important story from that path of walking where Christ walked. Peter and John run to the tomb. This is something extraordinary: the body has gone! Just to be sure, they both go into the tomb. It exerts a strange magnetism for them. As they stand in the tomb and turn around, looking out through the door, they are seeing exactly what the risen Christ first saw. This, in a sense, is where it all begins. As his eyes open and he looks out of the tomb, his tomb, the world is still asleep. How might it look to him, this world? This is the world which was created by his Father, the world he loves, the world he died to save, but also the world in which he was abandoned, rejected, ridiculed and killed. How will this world look to him as he steps forward and stands in the doorway? He has known the heights of human love, and the depths of human hate; he has known Heaven, where he lived with his Father since time began, and he has known Hell, visited and conquered by him in these three days in the tomb. So, he has known the joy of living in the Father's presence, and the horror of total loneliness, untouchable by the love of others, which is Hell. The eyes that look out of the tomb in the darkness of Easter night have seen all this. How does the world look to them now? If we are a community of people learning to see with the eyes of Christ, this is a question we cannot avoid. Easter Day becomes more than just a happy celebration of some past event, it becomes a hope for future power and achievement if it helps us see the world as he saw it on that first Easter morning.

As Jesus looks out of the tomb, the world looks drastically and radically broken and shaken up. The Son of God, through whom the world was created, has been crucified: violently rejected and killed by his creature man. The moral order has been shattered and broken, we are suddenly so much further from Eden. In one sense the world looks the same: the same trees, plants, birds, buildings, lakes and fields, but just below the surface it is all twisted. What will the risen one do? For most of us it would be tempting to hunt down the killers, the Jewish priests and the Roman soldiers, and exact vengeance; or, at the very least, to stand in front of them and say '*so you thought you would kill me, eh? So, now look*'. But this is not what he does. He sets about mending the torn fabric of creation, the tattered threads of the moral order, picking them up and painstakingly tying them back together, by looking for his friends – the people who had

misunderstood him and deserted him - and loving them. This is how he restores the little family who were trying, and will now continue to try, to follow him. It is not revenge, or punishment, or triumphalism, that restores the world to its first innocence, it is love and consolation.

So the first thing that the risen Christ sees with his risen eyes is a world where hatred, fear, violence and pride stalk, and they need to be unmasked and disarmed. Violence cannot unmask violence and show it as an inhuman aberration, a perversion of real humanity, a sign of failure and cowardice; only love can. The Church is that body of people who learn to see the world through risen eyes, people who see the moral fabric of the world shattered and tattered by violence and greed, and needing careful stitching back together, not with more violence and more greed, but with love and self-gift. Jesus seeks out his friends and carefully, gently, lovingly restores them. They are torn apart with sorrow and guilt over their failure to stand by him, their failure really to believe in them, and so with great tenderness he sets about putting them back together again: in the room behind locked doors; on the road to Emmaus; at breakfast by the lakeside. Again and again, he helps retie the broken threads of their damaged souls.

The disciples felt that they had failed him. They felt that the brokenness within them was final, nothing more could be done. But the rising of Jesus shows that injury, suffering and death do not bring it all to an end. It is, after all, not too late. However badly torn the moral fabric of our own lives, however deeply we feel it is too late, or we cannot make amends, it is never too late. So, it seems, the Church is not only the mystical body of people learning to see with the eyes of Christ and to walk in his way; it turns out that it is also the gathering of people who are humble enough to invite the divine danner into their lives to stitch them back together: they move from being broken and despairing, to being broken but hopeful. And that is quite a change. The message that they – we – can take in to a world that badly needs it, is that this is available for all; all people can make the change from broken and despairing (or even broken and indifferent) to broken and hopeful. That is Good News indeed. That is what set the first disciples on fire, and it is what still has the power to set us on fire, too.