

Easter Day

Over this Holy Week I've been filled with the sense of God's accompanying us on this religious journey. The model is already there in Scripture, of course: a forty-day journey through the desert: a forty-day floating on a flood, with the multitudinous seeds of the Creation in our ark: a forty-day hike to the Mountain of God, to which we came on Good Friday, to find it a place where human life *as we live it* spells death for the Son of God, living human life *as God wants it*.

In the Easter Vigil God calls us to meditate on the way we have come, and to look for what we have learned; we read, on a good day, the story of Creation, and that of the mountain Abraham climbed, with Isaac, thinking that his obedience to God was about to cost him the life of his beloved son. We hear of the testing moment when Israel faced Egypt, with the treacherous sea at their backs like a trap, and how the hand of God is put forth for us in our terminal state, how he can make a path through the grave for us. We are taught that water, the killing element, is also the one that gives life where it flows; and then the word of God calls on us to be converted, and to see the world in a new light, and to receive the message of an empty tomb as directed to us from God.

That is why the story we read this morning is so direct and vivid to us. They run to the tomb - already they are changed, though they could never have said why they ran, or what convulsion motivates their exhausted hearts, and gets them to present so co-ordinated, so single-minded a show of enthusiasm.

What do they find when they arrive?

Peter is out of condition, and he is not the Beloved Disciple. That is why he comes last in the race. The disciple looks into the place where the one who loved him was laid. Linen cloths lying on the ground. No comment. Peter arrives, and discovers that the young disciple has waited for the leader of the apostolic college to enter first. Peter verifies that the shroud is wholly there, on the earth: but that the cloth that had covered his face was in a different place, rolled up by itself. No comment still. Then the great moment comes: the Beloved Disciple enters the Holy Sepulchre. He sees, and at once the truth dawns on him, engulfs him with impossible joy. *He saw, and he believed.*

No-one who robs a grave unwraps the body. He saw instead a bed from which a sleeper has arisen, throwing aside the sheets. The deliberate testimony, so carefully delivered, stands firm in its place: *immediately there came out blood and water: the one who saw it delivers it, and he knows that he speaks the truth, and he gives it so that you may believe as well.* The death was absolutely real. Now the tomb is absolutely eloquent: he is risen from the dead.

When I think of the saints in all their variety and beauty, I am able to watch this stunningly straight announcement of the Easter faith refracted into infinite shades and showers of light, as the power of the risen Christ engages the powers that swept him to the Cross, and makes of them a triumphal procession of his own. There is never a contradiction of them: he said to Judas, *Do what you are here for*, to the soldiers, *Take me and let these others go*: to Caiaphas, *they are your own words*; to Pilate, *Yes, I am a King*. Above all he said to his Father: *your will be done*. May he grant us to carry our Cross with the same love and trust, so that each in our own way we may make part of his triumph over all that afflicts us, and so come to the glory of God.