

# *Easter Night*

This is the Night: the Passover from evil to good, from slavery to freedom, from death to life...there is no end to the opposites that meet in this most acute of all paradoxes.

Love is the heart of the matter, and love is of all things most nestled and at home with paradox. Maybe I'm unusual, but I don't think so: I can't predict or explain the people that I love. The way love explodes us as individuals and makes us pour ourselves out so liberally for another person should start us thinking how blissful paradox can be: the encounter of differences that attract and enliven us and each other is a tremendous experience of the God who lies behind opposites and contradictions, variety and unity, multitudes and families, bridegroom and bride.

The receiving into the ranks of the faithful of new members for the Church is therefore a special Paschal joy; as Jesus goes beyond all human and earthly limitations, so he calls whom he will, and adds their variety to the unity of his body. We greet you with surprise, interest, and joy.

Even in this tough, imprisoned human family Jesus could be filled with the bliss of God, could access it suddenly, crying out in wonder at the joy of revelation, at the way God shares his delight in what he has made, how the Father rejoices over us, and dances with joy for us in perpetual festival. To us God is just as unpredictable as we are to ourselves. So Jesus found himself seeking out the lost sheep, and bringing us constantly home, laid on his shoulders: to cancel our loneliness and reunite us with the flock, filled with joy because he had found the lost one.

What takes our breath is the way Jesus turns a world so full of bunkers and black holes into a theatre for glorious fullness of life. He opens blind eyes and deaf ears, and sweeps away from the twisted and tortured the affliction which bent and deformed them. He calls back those far from the land, and irrigates our desert with mercy and pardon, welcome and warmth; he shepherds lost minds and raddled hearts with the freshest of new birth and new grace. Despite the slow response of fallen men and women, he is always free and loving, dispensing hope where it seemed none is to be had. This generous love for living people is still to be known and received by those who seek him, because by the mystery of Easter the living Christ is still close to us in all his loving power:

*You will see greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

The seeing of marvels is not a thing of the past, and we promise those who become members of Christ tonight that they will see wonders in their own lives and the lives of others.

The Gospel today – Matthew’s Easter story – culminates with an actual encounter with the risen Lord. It is a great joy for us that this Vigil will not end without our meeting Jesus in the Eucharistic gifts. The continuing presence of Jesus, in a form related so closely to our life and its sustenance, reminds us that God never withdraws his gifts: that this poor flesh of ours is not found unworthy to lay hands on the sacred risen body of the Lord. We call this sacrament *communion*, because it is what makes us one with him, and him one with us. We are not spiritual beings, but enfleshed spirits.

This covenant does not remain in spiritual terms. It is mediated through the things of flesh. Let us prize this blessed food, and let it be the bread of travellers, ready to leave behind all trace of the slavery we endured, from which we spring like new lambs, at the call and under the hand of the indomitable Shepherd of the living and the dead. Let the unlooked-for truth dawn on us that we are loved with no limit and no conditions by the Lord of Life; that he has shown us the depth of his love by his dying; and that he will show us things that cannot and should not be forced into human definition, because he has been raised to life by the Father’s glory.