

**Saturday Night** Forty-six days ago we came up to the Altar to be darkened with ashes. But tonight we have lit a blessed fire, and by its light we are doing a simple work which will have extraordinary consequences. We are re-reading some things we have read before, and we are looking at them through new eyes. It is the doing of this which, from the beginning, has brought the joy of Easter to birth.

I suppose to some people the reading of Scripture remains the fusty, old-fashioned thing it seems to a young teenager who likes his literature fast and racy and cool. To me, Scripture has always had a huge appeal: its birthplace is the Middle East, where civilisation was born. The Old Testament has the massive simplicity of Egypt, the bright, stark certainty of the desert, and the long wisdom of the nomad and the shepherd. Its imagery is bold and clear. Its emotions have vast force and power. Yet the austerity, the spareness of its touch holds the attention, like a sudden, unlikely flower growing in a white wall, or the feel of cool water in a landscape of drought. The Old Testament knows the order of human needs: hunger, thirst, loneliness, love and hatred, the meaning of journeying and of arrival, the meaning of the land.

Maybe that is why the stories of the Old Testament, delivered in clear prophetic tones and in lapidary commandments, become lodged in our imagination. The truthfulness of them, their wisdom, grants them easy access to all minds. When we read them we remember what it is to have a shared heritage, a memory that unites many persons into one people. As we listen to them in Church, they begin to invite us into a shared world, which is united by a shared past that's carefully kept: a memory-palace with many rooms, where we are all family members.

Tonight's vigil has been a saga through the rooms of the family home. We revisited the vast entrance-hall of the Creation story, where a superhuman Creator hurled the heavenly bodies to their stations and founded the plan of the Universe, a mystery we do not yet understand.

We travelled up Mount Moriah with the Father of all believers, Abraham, and his beloved son Isaac, climbing a disguised Calvary centuries before the Son of David climbed it, carrying wood for the sacrifice.

We retold the tangled account of the parting of the sea, where a redeemed people passed in safety through the womb of the waters to rebirth, the same waters where their enemies perished by drowning. So the terror of life and death are locked together in a mysterious paradox: death to them, life to us, and the same water as the minister of God

Then we meditated on the waters of the Promised Land, and heard the calling of God to come ourselves to be fed and satisfied with true bread and clear water.

At last we heard of a washing clean of our reddened hands, a re-gathered people coming home from their scattered paths, to be made one once again in the worship of one God. If our God is one we are one; and the cleansing of untruth will demolish all distances and separations which have defiled our history, and alienated us from the mystery of God.

There is only one interpreter of all these amazing texts: the one who died, and rose to new life: it is when he reads to us these words of the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms that our eyes and ears will be opened. He trod the path of God's mysterious plan, not demanding to understand it; he ascended the hill to be God's lamb; his baptism brought down the Spirit of sons and daughters, when God spoke over the Jordan river, saying *You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you*. Jesus fed us, multitudinous, in the desert, and called us to seek for true bread, and said, *I am the living bread that has come from heaven*. It is to break the unleavened bread of his Last Supper that we are congregated tonight, and soon we shall revisit the water that cleanses us from idolatry, forgives all our sins, uniting the whole people in the risen Body that is the Church. Let him speak in us, risen in glory from the tomb of our un-lived life; and let our hearts burn within us as he speaks to us.