

Easter Vigil

We have come so far in the last forty minutes. This great ceremony began with the theme of Creation, because the Resurrection is vital news for every living thing in Creation, from the Pope to the nearest blade of grass. You know that the Pope is hovering tonight between life and death. If you hold in your hand a spring flower, you will know that it is in the same condition. However well we conceal the fact, we are never that far from death as we walk along a pavement or take a deep breath in a crowded place. Every day you have lived has walked along a margin between life and death.

We have therefore lived in anxiety and fear, and the power of death has killed in us so many things already. We have watched our relationships and our impulses labour under its influence; we have spoiled so much, wasted so much, let so many doors close, and lost so much hope because death is stalking the world, and has many masterpieces to show us.

What Jesus did with his life gave an opposite account. He gave life, restored happiness, and called us to believe in the eternal destiny of the passing world. He called the power of darkness out, and confronted it just as we do. But instead of compromising with it or buying time from it, he suffered its assaults to the ultimate: where he was brought down by enthroned hatred, political abuse, and the treachery of friends. This much we can date to the first third of the first century, in Palestine.

Then, in his crucified and buried Son, God contradicts death. It takes no new deed to do this, since it is the Father's eternal delight to give life to his Son, as it is the Son's eternal delight to give himself to his Father, in that mutual gift that is the Holy Spirit. That isn't a first-century fact, but an *eternal* one, and it is present to us now. What we celebrate tonight is the fact that the eternal joy of the Holy Trinity is now a *human* fact.

And God has contradicted in this way our own depressing conclusions about ourselves. You must let the voice of Jesus greet you, in the depth of your own darkened, choked-up heart, like the voice of a rescuer who has dug through the fallen rock to liberate you. You are chosen to be freed, to live through love in the presence of God, to share this life of the eternal. Again, this isn't a temporal fact, true tonight but maybe a bit faded by Monday week, and no longer true by the end of April. It is the truth of God, now and forever, and the darkness will never defeat it.