

A Sermon for Easter Sunday

We are bound to say as we now arrive at this glorious Easter time, (in the words of the song) 'What a difference a day makes', or, after Holy Week 'what a difference a week makes'. Within the space of three days, everything for the Christian Church changes. And in the passing of this oh so brief period of time -- of Holy Week and now of Easter, the Church has endured the pain of death and now all is transformed for ever. The Church's proclamation is the one which has proceeded out of the death of Christ, and through his Glorious Resurrection proclaims new life for the world. It has all been encapsulated into a week, and the saving events into three days.

The days we have lived through cannot be experienced separately but together. They define The Christian Church, and this evening's Easter Liturgy allows us to celebrate new life in Christ as we recapitulate the saving events of our Faith. This faith emerges out of the life that Easter makes possible, and it is ushered in as a flame, flickering delicately, The Light of the Risen Christ proclaimed as "Christ our Light" and then acknowledged and honored in the glorious Easter song The Exsultet...

Then there is a Liturgy of the Word for the recapitulation of Christian Faith; the tracing of its origins. It begins with The Creation Narrative in Genesis, and then proceeds to the Exodus and Abraham and then the promise of the coming of the One who will promise us the God not our of religious duty alone, but his own being from the communication of one heart speaking to another. This Easter Liturgy will be a profound celebration of the sacramental life that God has granted us through the blessing of the font, of the baptismal water and of the renewal of our baptismal vows. Everything is to find its renewal through the grace which is Easter. We then celebrate the Eucharist, dominated by the great Easter candle...

I was in Waitrose this afternoon and saw the sad sight of the Easter eggs which were becoming too difficult to be sold. They sat on the shelves, forlorn, with their expensive price tickets waiting to suffer the ignominy of being reduced by half, or even more when the supermarket's 'Easter effect', marketed since the end of February, becomes redundant and no longer sales worthy. We live in a supermarket economy in which sell-by dates mix with sales trends and Waitrose's own seamless thread which runs both vaguely with and absurdly counter to the church calendar – how else can we explain the fact of hot cross buns sold in Marks and Spencer's at Christmastime? In the popular mind's eye, very little would be known about Maundy Thursday or Good Friday except as adjuncts to Easter.

Easter-time stretches out for weeks. Lent is passed by, forgotten; after all how do you market Lent? A little speech was made after a show three weeks ago at a local theatre in which we were all wished a Happy Easter on the Second Sunday of Lent! And so we experience this gap between a popular, commercial culture which no longer remembers this time of Holy Week and Easter. For Christians this is very strange. For this is the most important time of the Christian Year, one in which Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are each and alone significant in very specific ways. Each belong to one another, and they all belong to that part of The Church's life which places a premium on the hallowing of time. The Church's calendar allows us to inhabit time in a way in which it is not

thrown away, discarded as a passing fad. It commemorates and celebrates and marks time. And at this time for the Church there is the concentration upon so many different parts of our lives with the life and death and resurrection of Christ.

The passing of time is not made without its being offered to God in and through his Son. And this for the Church is deeply inspiring. It is life-giving and is a way of living the Resurrection in the present and in the time to come. This is because, through our worship, it finds its place within our hearts. And so we don't speak of the 'Easter Effect' or 'The Easter Experience' without its having been written on our hearts. And when this is done, we become as the followers who rush to the tomb. The Easter joy is not only held in our hearts but proclaimed to our communities as joy and life and hope.

The contrary movement is the experience of an Easter Bank Holiday with the true Easter taken out, and we return to our unsold but expensive eggs! We see a society which no longer observes a calendar which allows for Easter as the time of Resurrection and as the one which is the holder of new life and a deeper, richer sense of the presence and purposes of God with the hallowing of time. 'On the third day he rose again from the dead' we say in the Creed. It has been important in this church celebrate the Resurrection through the preceding death. The joy is like that of the followers of Jesus who come to the empty tomb and hear the words of the angel "Why seek the dead among the living. He is not dead. He has risen, as he said he would. Go therefore to Galilee where you will find him'.

We can value the Christian manner of time-keeping as it draws us more surely into The Holy Time of Easter, which has proceeded out of the life and earth and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not by accident, but in and through time – the same time frame that we inhabit. The joyful message of Easter is that his time and our time have become everlastingly one. Now, in Christ, our hearts beat as one!