

Sunday of the Resurrection

Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; 1 Corinthians 5: 6-8; John 20: 1-9

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the core belief of Christianity.

Jesus has not been resuscitated but has risen to a new life. His passion, death and resurrection are seen as the fulfillment of Scripture. He has not risen to new life by his own power but has been raised by the Father. The way in which scripture symbolically presents this truth is to say that Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is Redeemer, Saviour, Lord, the Risen One. He is the author of a new and indestructible life.

In his first letter to the Corinthian community, in chapter 15 of that letter, Paul emphatically asserts that belief in the resurrection of Jesus is the core belief of Christian faith. This letter was written perhaps thirty years after the death of Jesus, and, as such, is one of the earliest testimonies of the resurrection in the New Testament Canon. Persons in the Corinthian community have denied the possibility of resurrection. For Paul this denial means they have no hope. Paul bases his belief on the appearances of the risen Lord and on the testimony of those who have encountered the risen Jesus.

The readings for the liturgy of Easter Sunday (all of them New Testament texts) emphasise two key themes about Christ's resurrection: **witness** and **fulfilment of scripture**. The risen Christ is not simply to be admired; the risen Christ calls each believer to participation in mission. Let us now look briefly at each of the three readings for the Easter Sunday liturgy.

Our first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles, the faith narrative of the early Christian community, composed by the evangelist Luke. The reading comes from a wider incident of the encounter between the apostle Peter and Cornelius who is a Gentile convert and in fact, a Roman soldier. We note that Peter uses the word "witness" four times in this speech thus indicating its importance to us as the reader of the story.

Peter recounts the basic details of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. He emphasises to Cornelius that he has been a witness himself to these events and so can testify to their truth. Peter makes no reference to proof but only to witness and testimony. God is not interested in proof or proving anything to anyone. What God asks and requires is faith in His saving events on the basis of the witness and testimony of others.

Peter's speech also makes explicit reference to the fulfilment of scripture and particularly the theme that forgiveness comes through belief. This encounter between Peter and Cornelius is a key one in terms of the theme of participation in mission and we will return to these two men at the conclusion of this short reflection.

Our second reading is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthian community. Paul's theme is newness of life and the ways in which belief in the resurrection of Christ makes a person new. The point is that Jesus' resurrection is not some abstract belief or notion. The believer shares in that risen life. Paul was well versed in the Jewish scriptures (what we call the Old Testament). In our passage he draws on the image of the Passover feast among Jewish people. The key text here is Exodus 12. Moses has received instructions from God about the ritual preparation of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread as the meal to be consumed before the tribes leave Egypt. For the Jewish people Passover symbolises the passage from slavery to freedom. For Paul this same Passover ritual symbolises the journey from death to life. Christ is now the Passover lamb. We note Paul's masterly use of Old Testament imagery to describe the importance and significance of this new reality of Christ's risen life.

Our Gospel passage comes from the Gospel of John. Again, the emphasis is on witness and fulfilment of scripture. John's Gospel is a late work, written perhaps sixty years after the death of Jesus. It is presented as the faith narrative of a first-hand witness, described in the Gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved, but never identified as John. John's story of the resurrection centres around the empty tomb. Mary of Magdala presumes the grave has been desecrated and the body stolen. The beloved disciple, however, draws a different conclusion: Jesus has risen from the dead. This link between the empty tomb and belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a key development in the New Testament literature. The apostle Paul was writing to his Christian communities in Asia Minor and Greece some thirty years before the composition of John's Gospel. Paul knows nothing of an empty tomb tradition so this link between tomb and belief is a late development. Paul's firm belief in the resurrection of Jesus comes from his own personal encounter with the Risen One and the way in which that encounter has projected him into mission.

The New Testament literature about the resurrection of Jesus emphasises the importance of witness and evangelisation. It does not speak about proselytising. It is the witness of one's own life and belief that draws others to the risen Christ.

As the Church of the Sandhurst Diocese we are currently engaged in preparation for the Synod, now on the local level and later moving towards the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023. The key elements of a synodal church are **communion, participation** and **mission**. There is a clear relation between these three elements. The readings for Easter Sunday invite us to reflect particularly on the theme of participation. We listen to one another and in doing so open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. All of us by virtue of our Baptism are qualified to contribute to this process of listening.

In our first reading from Acts we met Peter and Cornelius. As you read the story carefully you will readily see four key elements in this meeting: listening, dialogue, encounter, accompaniment. The Holy Spirit has called Peter to participate in mission. Peter now invites Cornelius to participate in mission. It is interesting to note that Cornelius before his encounter with Peter would have been regarded by the early Christian community as a person on the fringes and so perhaps of liminal interest to them since Cornelius was a Roman soldier. The Holy Spirit surprises Peter in the divine commission to reach out and encounter this person on the margins and include him in the believing community. Peter meets Cornelius in obedience to a dream (Acts 10:9-16). He learns that God is faithful but not predictable. Many persons are called to participate in mission.