

So, the whole great cycle of Easter is nearing completion now; all we are waiting for, in a few weeks' time, is Christ's farewell to the earth in the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The journey that began with Ash Wednesday seems to have been a long one – and, even trimmed down by Covid restrictions, a tiring one, too; except that this year – unlike last year, when there was nothing – Easter actually happened and was celebrated in church (in so far as it was allowed to be) and, in these times, that was a great and consoling light in the collective darkness. The Paschal candle acts for us as a liturgical symbol of this.

Of course, there is more than one level – there are indeed many – to the journey that led from Lent to Easter, from the Passion to the Resurrection. It has dimensions to it other than the theological and the liturgical – some of which, in this life at least, we may never know or even guess at. We have celebrated in time the outward events of our salvation which took place in history; but there is always more.

The most fundamental realisation about the journey into Easter and the great Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Feast of the Lord's Resurrection, is that the cycle is never *not* happening. It is over and done with in history, true, but it goes on in the soul, it continues in the archetypal realm that we call the Kingdom, it forever *is* in the borderland

between heaven and earth, beyond time and space. It is a pattern in the fabric of eternity. And above all, it is happening in the human heart – not repeatedly, but continuously. Meister Eckhart made the same point about Christmas: in a sermon in Cologne Cathedral at Christmas 1302, he said:

“We are celebrating the feast of the Eternal Birth which God the Father has borne and never ceases to bear in all eternity... But if this doesn't take place in me, what use is it? Everything depends on this: that Christ should be born in me.”

In the same way, we can say everything depends on this: that Christ should be crucified and rise again in me. Words are inadequate – all we can say is that Christ's saving self-sacrifice is never *not*. It always *is*. To know this, you only have to think of the love you have in your heart for your spouse or your children or dearest friend: you may have married years ago in time, your children may have been born long before – or even just recently – but beyond the timeline, beyond time and space, that love always *is* in your heart... and it is never *not*. Your heart is not chained by history: God made it to grasp the eternal, the everlasting and everything in our lives that reflects it.

The Mass celebrated at every altar in every church is a living sign and symbol of this: it is a lifting of the veil between time and eternity. The ancient Gnostics believed that the stars

in the night sky were tiny holes in a great black curtain, through which they could glimpse the radiance of the true home; likewise, the Mass draws back the curtain of time and space that hides from us the eternal Mystery beyond. The Eucharist is the path to the Resurrection given material form here and now in bread and wine; just as we take into ourselves the Eucharistic Body of the Lord, so it is within ourselves that the journey we have made together from Lent to Easter, is always happening in each one of us.

We all have our own inner Holy Thursday. On Holy Thursday night Jesus initiated a new intimacy with his disciples when he instituted the Eucharist. It was a sacramental night that affects our lives even now. When we experience a closeness to God or – more readily for us – God in those we love, with family and friends, or with the beauty of nature or in books or music; when our heart and mind leaps out towards another in some bond of intimacy, then it is Holy Thursday in our soul.

We have our own inner Good Friday, too. When the sky on our horizon seems always overcast or black; when we can find no joy or interest in the world or anything the world has to offer; when we are overcome by a sense of our own weakness and inadequacy, our ineffective attempts to live some sort of Christian life; when we have offended or hurt those we love

and seem to have lost all hope closeness with them; when our mind is full of tormenting doubts or fears and our heart is empty of love, then it is Good Friday in our soul.

But: when love and joy return again, when our heart begins to expand after being contracted for perhaps so long, when intimate closeness with those we love – and above all with God – feeds and sustains us; when we more aware of mercy and forgiveness than our own sinfulness and failings – then it is Easter Day in our soul. The early 17th century poet George Herbert has a wonderful phrase for this:

‘Who would have thought my shrivel’d heart
Could have recover’d greennesse?’

This great *inward* journey into Easter goes on in each one of us throughout our lives, sometimes from one moment to the next. Our assurance and our hope is that the Easter Day we shall finally come to will be in the realm of eternity, not time, where the radiance of the Resurrection will not be from moment to moment, but always *now*.