

Homily for The Easter Vigil Douai Abbey, 2021

“When the sabbath was over...”

The Resurrection of the Lord is, of course, the greatest of his miracles. As we read through the accounts of his healing miracles earlier in the gospels, modern readers will be struck by one clear fact: that the crowd of onlookers doesn't doubt that a miracle has taken place, what they seem principally concerned about is to protest at Our Lord's breaking of the sabbath. In the account of his Passion which we've reflected on over the past two days, one aspect which again strikes the modern reader is the powerful exercise of control by the authorities and the crowd over Jesus: Pilate, the high priest, the mob, the soldiers, and even Judas subjugate the defenceless Jesus, and the fixation with the keeping of the sabbath remains until the end: the body was rapidly taken down from the cross before the sabbath began.

All these forms of control over Jesus by others stand in stark contrast to what happened at the Resurrection where fearful amazement, alarm, and loss of control are striking, by the chief priests who bribed witnesses and sought desperately to spread the news that his friends had stolen the body, by the soldiers who lay like dead men, and by those insecure disciples who were determined not to believe what the women told them. Unlike the Passion where men seek to control, the Resurrection is dominated by God in control.

We might say, then, that the Resurrection is for us a story completely out of control. I guess it provides the greatest stumbling block to faith, our faith, because it is so unbelievable, so unscientific, so utterly incomprehensible in human terms. It is the hardest Christian teaching to believe; it is the greatest test of our faith. Yet paradoxically, and St Paul in particular was aware of this, it is what kept Christian faith alive and has probably made Christianity the single most influential phenomenon in the entire history of humanity since all of us, at the end of the day, choose life above all else. The Resurrection is a reminder to all of us that God is in control, not us, and that should be a relief and a joy. And while we fumble towards understanding the magnitude of the Resurrection of Jesus, we try to carry out his command to take, with joy, his good news from Galilee to the ends of the earth.

Abbot Geoffrey Scott