

HOMILY: EASTER DAY 2019

In each of the Gospels, the first witnesses of the Risen Lord are commanded to go and tell others the Good News: 'Go to my brethren...' 'Go quickly and tell...' 'Go, tell his disciples and Peter...' The glory of the Resurrection is essentially a mystery to be shared. The Lord's Passover was a Passover from the final aloneness of Calvary to the infinite richness of eternal life with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He who 'was made to be sin' for our sake, the cursed One 'hanging on a gibbet' – passed over to share with the Father and the Holy Spirit in an eternal exchange of life and love in the Divine Family of the Holy Trinity: and it is to be sharers in that same eternal exchange of life and love of the Holy Trinity that is our hope, as baptized brothers and sisters of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot fail to be acutely aware of what a hold the demon of loneliness and isolation and alienation has on so many people in our present day society and culture. We may well be surrounded by other people – but at the same time sense ourselves alone, cut off from others in everything that really matters. I am sure you will all know those Lowry paintings of Lancashire mill towns, peopled with multitudes of little, stick-like figures – but each figure alone – each seemingly unrelated to any other, scurrying fearfully on, yet to no apparent purpose. Lowry conjures up, at least to my mind, a fearful vision of the hell of aloneness, that dogs so many today – maybe including ourselves.

But today's great Feast assures us that the Risen Lord is with us, to lead us in triumphant procession out of that terrible loneliness and alienation to the community, to the family, to the 'social joys', of heaven. And one way of thinking of that is provided – at least in my mind's eye – however unlikely this may seem -by a scene in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera: 'Ruddigore'. It is the scene that takes place at midnight in the baronial hall. The walls are lined with portraits, a great array of the dead, each one enclosed, in his or her frame – which is sometimes how we may ourselves feel, cut off from others, alone: perceiving the world, as someone once described it to me, as if I were alone behind a plate glass screen. Then, at midnight, a miracle happens: the ancestral portraits come to life, the figures step out, alive, from their frames and join together in a dance, circling round the stage in wonderfully graceful, intricate, shared movements.

That is, I think, a faint – and I hope, not too irreverent – sort of shadow of the triumph of the Risen Lord, which he shares with us his People. For in one of the most ancient Christian traditions – Christ harrowing hell – the Lord is portrayed as leading out the dead from hell in a great dance – making clear that the loneliness and alienation Adam and Eve brought on themselves and on us their descendants is at an end. For now Christ leads us, with all the baptized, in triumphant procession to share in his company, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Or, finally, to put it in slightly more sober terms, St Athanasius, in one of his 'Easter Letters', writes: 'This Feast guides us through the misfortunes which befall us in this world. And now God gives us the happiness of salvation, which flows from this feast, and makes us friends. At the same time, he gathers us all together, uniting us spiritually, wherever we may be.... The miracle of his kindness lies in this: he brings together to this feast those who are far off; and those who are perhaps separated in the body, he makes spiritually close, by the unity of faith'. May today's Feast renew our faith and our hope and our joy in the communion of the Church – in heaven and in paradise and on earth – one in the shared exchange of life and love of the Holy Trinity.