

## EASTER SUNDAY 2024

I heard the story of an American man who had gone with his family on pilgrimage to the Holy Land many years ago. His mother-in-law, who had been with the rest of the family on the trip, sadly died while they were in Jerusalem. The undertaker who was assisting them explained that they had two options. The first was to have the body flown back to the States, but this would be expensive over \$5,000US, or they could bury her in Jerusalem for \$150US. The undertaker gave the man time to think and then said, *"So which option do you want to take?"* After a while the man respond: *"I will have her flown back to the States."* *"That's very thoughtful, though expensive."* said the undertaker *"Thoughtful, listen a man died in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago and was buried here and after three days he rose again, even for \$150 US dollars I'm not going to take that chance!"*

St Paul reminded us in the second reading that Christ is not only risen from the dead, but His life death and resurrection affects us in a profound manner: *'He is your life.'* And now *"our life is hidden with Christ in God."* That means that you and I were born for the impossible. In fact, we're uniquely designed to walk in a relationship with God and in this relational journey the impossibilities of life can be confronted. It's in our DNA, we're designed to carry that possibility, that potential, every day of our life.

I remember an occasion talking to some young people I met in an airport. I was trying share about the difference Jesus makes, had made to my life and I recall saying that the claim concerning the death and resurrection of Christ was so significant that if it's not true then I would owe humanity the rest of my life to warn them of this lie and to disprove this fallacy. On the other hand, if it is true then I owe all of humanity the rest of my life to demonstrate the power of that Resurrection because it is **the** thing, it's **the** thing that defines everything else. All of life is defined because of this one great reality.

It takes away all the confusion that exists in the world, all the craziness that is going on, every single bit of it, because when Jesus died he did not

die missing anything out, he didn't forget to deal with somethings, he didn't offer himself as an offering for part of the problem, he actually became the offering to settle all the issues we struggle with. CS Lewis says: *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun - S.U.N. has risen not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."* Pope Francis in the encyclical *Lumen Fedi* writes: *"Those who believe see; they see with a light that enlightens their entire journey."* Why do we see differently once we meet the risen Jesus? Because Pope Francis says: *"Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith...Christ is the mirror in which they find their own image fully revealed."*

Permit me to put flesh on this truth with two testimonies from life. On one occasion many years ago, I was visiting a primary school in a deprived area of Sunderland. There was a group of seven-year-olds painting. I came to one small girl, and I asked: *"What are you painting?"* She looked up at me with a look which was a mixture of pity and distain. *"Can't you see?"* "Yes", I said, *"but I was hoping you'd tell me."* She folded her arms and shook her head and tutted: *"Do you see this fella here, this is God."* The man was sitting on what was supposed to be a big throne. I pointed to a group of others and said: *"These people seem very unwell. They're not well at all, they're very sick."* There was one man with a patch over his eye, another with a sling, a woman on crutches." *"Can you see who this fella is?"* "I think it's Jesus" I said. Again, her head shook. *"You're not so daft after all...but can you guess, what Jesus is going to do?"* Now even if I had, I was not going to spoil this moment because I could sense there was a message she had to give. "No", I said, *"I've no idea what Jesus is going to do."*

A smile of satisfaction came across what had been a very serious face. *"I'll tell you then, these people are very sick, they need help, so Jesus is going to pick them up and carry them to God. Then he's going sit on God's knee, and they will sit on Jesus' knee because that's what Jesus does, do you see, that's what Jesus does!"* I was awe struck. I knew the family that this girl came from, no faith background, she had never come across Paul's letter to the Colossians that tells us our life is hidden in Christ in God. But she knew it. Pope Francis writes in *Lumen Fidei*:

*“Those who have opened their hearts to God’s love, heard his voice and receive his light, cannot keep this gift to themselves. Since faith is hearing and seeing, it is also handed on as word and light.”*

The name of Fr Wolfgang Thamm SJ will mean nothing to you. I learnt that he died peacefully in Harare on Good Friday aged 97. Originally from Germany he had been a missionary in Zimbabwe for over 67 years. Fr Thamm came to Monte Cassino where our Monastery of Christ the Word is situated. A truly great man of God who never lost his passion and enthusiasm for the Gospel. Christ was alive for him. Yet my goodness he could be demanding and a little stubborn and when he lost his temper, the earth shook! There was an occasion that I had to go up to the mission to give him a message and on the way, I met some of the children from the village who were preparing for baptism, and I asked them why they were in tears?

They had been with Fr Thamm in a pre-baptism class, and he had been asking very difficult questions that they couldn’t answer. So, he lost his temper and told them they would not be baptised. When I arrived at his house, I knocked on the door and entered the lion’s den and as we were talking there was another knock on the door. He shouted, *“Come in”*. In walked Rutendo Gungira, who at the time was around eight. She smiled at me and then looked seriously at Fr Thamm. *“Yes”*, he barked at her. Pulling herself up to her full height she said in a clam voice. *“Fr Thamm you asked many difficult questions, and we could not answer, but you didn’t ask the most important question of all.”* Now in all his decades of catechetical teaching Fr Thamm had never had his teaching method questioned by an eight-year-old!

He turned, red in the face and I thought he was about to devour Rutendo or have a heart attack. *“Important question”* he spat out, *“Important question, what important question did I fail to ask?”* *“You never asked if we love Jesus, you never asked if we know his love for us!”* With the confidence of an expert theologian, she turned and left! There was a moment’s silence and then he turned to me and said: *“She is absolutely right. What a powerful missionary she is!”* They were baptised. *“The light of Christ shines as in a mirror, upon the face of Christians, as it spreads, it comes down to us, so that we too can share in that vision and reflect that light to others.”* We saw a beautiful example of this yesterday evening as the light of Christ was passed

around the Abbey Church and as the light increased so the darkness disappeared. Now, it is time to do that when you leave this church.

This Triduum has been a lived example and experience of partnership in faith. Those who were sharing reflections were a mixture of monks and our lay friends. I thank Brenden from *Word on Fire*, who encouraged us to open the 10 doors of evangelisation, our own Gabrielle who spoke of the power of lived faith in her life and work, Robert and Amanda Toone and family who revealed that the family really is the domestic Church, the body of Christ, the seed bed of faith. And then my own brethren who generously shared from their faith experience.

But the partnership was experienced in the Arcadian singers whose musical contribution enhanced our liturgical encounter. Those who read or served, Andrea, whose skill with the flowers brings beauty and joy, the ushers. And then there was the Daniel group and our Oblates, what a gift you are to this community, you are an extension of our Benedictine family. Today Karen Ziglam and Sarah Walker will make their final Oblation and become living witness to Christ who is alive.

And there is yourselves. Now it is time to return and whether that is at work, among our family members, at university or with friends and neighbours. They will inevitably ask you, where you have been? Did you have a 'nice' Easter holiday? This is your chance with simple joy and sincerity to be His hands and feet and mouth and heart and voice. Tell them, He's alive. Explain how he has made a difference to you and the choices you make.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God and because of that You have been empowered to be a window through which His outrageous love can shine. I wish you every blessing of this joyful Easter season.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB  
*Ampleforth Abbey*

31 March 2024