

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK

Genesis 1. 1 – 2. 4a; Exodus 14. 10-31, 15. 1a; Isaiah 55. 1-11; Zephaniah 3. 14-20

Romans 6. 3-11

Luke 24. 1-12

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

I wonder how many of you have known what it is to be afraid of the dark. There is something about being awake in the night and not being able to sleep; somehow worries and concerns become amplified in the darkness. I remember that when I was a young boy, I would listen intently to the noises of the night and sometimes they would frighten me.

Vigils take place when it is dark. This Easter Vigil is no exception, and most deliberately so, because the gospels tell us that the Resurrection happened during the night. St Luke, as we have just heard, relates that Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb as it began to dawn; and they found that the tomb was empty. Throughout the liturgy this evening, we have heard how God's power can transform the darkness and make it as bright as the day.

As the new fire was kindled and the darkness began to recede, we heard the words: 'Eternal God, who made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of your one true light'. And as we processed into the darkened church, led by the Paschal Candles, our tiny flames drove back the darkness and filled the church with light. *The Exsultet* took up this same theme, with the words: 'This is the night!' 'Most blessed night!'

The light and the darkness seemed to have become one and so, unafraid, we extinguished our individual lights for a while as we listened to God's saving history, illuminated by the Paschal Candle that represents the light of Christ.

'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters' (Gen 1. 1-2).

God moved over the waters in the darkness.

At the very beginning of time, what is described as darkness to us becomes light for God: creative light that scatters the darkness.

'Then God said, "Let there be light"' (1. 3).

Adam and Eve hid themselves from God because they were afraid of him. They hid in the shadows; and from the beginning of the Fall, darkness became associated with fear. They could not comprehend that God was as much in the darkness as in the daylight. We associate darkness with fear and evil, but God can reveal himself as much in the darkness as in the light. As the psalmist writes, 'even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you' (Ps 139. 11).

And God chooses night as the time in which he reveals himself most powerfully.

In the Old Testament, we remember that the exodus from Egypt, that great story of salvation history for God's chosen people, happens at night (Gen 14. 19-31); and God leads his people through the Red Sea by the pillar of fire. This pre-figures what we have done tonight and explains why, on this most holy night, we celebrate the

sacrament of baptism. God leads his people through the dark water of death into new life in Christ. This is why we renew our baptismal covenant and why we are sprinkled with water from the font.

In the New Testament, in the gospels, we note that the night is also significant:

- It was during the night that our Lord came to the disciples on the stormy sea, walking on the water (Mt 14. 22-33).
- Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and found himself with the one who is the truth and the light (Jn 3. 1-21).
- Judas went to betray Christ at night; and our Lord chose the night to pray for his disciples that they might all be one (Mt 26. 36-46).
- And even during the day, when Jesus is dying on the cross, it became night. As St Matthew writes, from noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon' (Mt 27. 45).

Finally, Christ was placed in the dark tomb, under the shadow of darkness; and we believe that he went to the place of the dead, a place described as a place of shadows (Acts 2. 24, Eph 4. 9, 1 Pet 3. 18-20). But, as the psalmist again reminds us: 'If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there (139. 8).

In St John's gospel we read that 'Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb' (Jn 20. 1a) - while it was still dark! What better time for destroying death than in the night: 'This is the night when Jesus Christ vanquished hell, broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.'

This is the night!

The first Adam chose darkness in which to hide, eventually returning to the darkness of the dust from which he was made. The second Adam chose the darkness of the grave to conquer death and sin and returned to the Father's side to plead our cause for ever.

This is the night, my friends, and we need never be afraid of the dark again.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.