

Homily for Easter 2018

Our Easter, our Passover, coincides well with the Jewish Passover of eight days which began on Friday at sunset. When we prepare for Easter with the candidates for Baptism I always like to talk to them about the Paschal Candle. We lit it and carried it in with great ceremony tonight. This year it is decorated with the Cooktown Orchid, the floral emblem of Queensland. And it has the year 2018 on it. Not just 2018 years since Christ died and rose but indicating that we participate in Jesus' dying and rising now in 2018. The thing about a candle is that it gives light. But as it gives light the candle itself is consumed. The Exultet we heard sung says "For it is fed by the melting wax, which the mother bee brought forth to make this precious candle." The Paschal Candle is not just some artefact of mass produced candles. It brings to our sight the deep relationship that exists between all of creation and the ever loving, ever creative God. It is a cosmic Christ it honours.

For us in our Easter Liturgy the Paschal Candle is the symbol of Christ. In giving light the candle is consumed. The light Christ is, and shares with us, comes at the cost of his life. So the candle is a wonderful metaphor of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, that is, his death and resurrection. In other words the candle illustrates what love is. God is love, St John says. God's very self gift is revealed in Jesus Christ. Revealed to us in the face of an historical human being.

It is a light which recalls the pillar of flame which was the guiding light of Israel through the wilderness by night as they left Egypt. Christ is our guiding light through all the uncertainties of this present age. Metaphors, however, do have their limits. The candle is entirely consumed eventually just as Christ was entirely consumed on the cross. But the light that Christ gives is infinite. God's love and mercy for us is everlasting.

I sometimes wonder why God created so many people. Each person ever since human beings walked the earth has been unique. We know that only too well as we try to understand each other with all our differences, changing moods and desires. Each person is a deep mystery to every other. So why so many? Why not just one person? I don't know! Would not one have been enough for God to show love? That would be true enough if God were only a being like us in some far away heaven. But God is not like that. God is revealed as communion, as love itself, as a relationship that we name Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In such a God creation buds and flowers to bring forth the abundant and extraordinary universe we call home.

However, in a spiritual sense, perhaps we can say there is only one person, Jesus Christ. In Baptism we become one with him in his self gift to the Father for us and one with him in his love which is the Holy Spirit. "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (John 1:2-4).

St Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" 164 times in his letters. It is not to be understood just in some personal spiritual way. For St Paul it has a very concrete meaning. It means to be within that place and time when the Spirit of Christ is to be found. That place and time is his His Body, the Church. To be 'in Christ' then is to be Church. The conversion needed for us to be in Christ, to be Church, becomes visible in Baptism which breaks down all barriers of race, gender, status, nationality. It is there that we find a home, a foretaste of the many rooms and mansions in his Father's house (cf John 14:1-6).

So Paul can say, and we ritualise with the white Baptismal garment, "You have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Colossians 3:11).

That is also why Baptism is the primordial Sacrament of Reconciliation. By faith in Christ and immersion in water in the name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit we become a completely new creation. The past is gone we are immersed in the life of the Trinity which is love itself. And like the Jews each year at Passover remembering the new life God gave them by bringing them out of Egypt, we too, remember our Passover in Jesus Christ as gather for Eucharist. We Christians only dare to appropriate the Jewish title Passover because Jesus himself was a Jew and asked us to do this in memorial of him. It is our thanksgiving sacrifice of praise. Fr Graham