

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Easter Vigil – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2021**

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Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Let this be our greeting throughout the Easter season. Let Christ's resurrection shine in our lives. Let Easter joy overflow into our homes.

Filled with nostalgia for unrestricted Easter celebrations in pre-pandemic times, I opened Leon Tolstoy's last novel, *Resurrection*, and read his delightful account of the Easter midnight liturgy: "Everything was festive, solemn, bright, and beautiful: the priest in his silver cloth vestments with gold crosses; the deacon, the clerk and chanter in their silver and gold surplices; [...] the merry tunes of the hymns [...]; and the continual blessing of the people by the priests, who held candles decorated with flowers."

In the Orthodox church, as the bells toll, the light is passed from candle to candle, there is the Paschal Greeting: "Christ is risen!" and the singing of the festal hymn of the Resurrection:

*Christ is risen from the dead,  
trampling down death by death,  
and upon those in the tombs  
bestowing life!*

- they reach their crescendo. With candles lit, the faithful spill out into the streets and carry the light back to their homes, as a blessing and a promise to have their lives illuminated through Christ's resurrection.

This is something I miss in our online Easter celebration, the moment when someone turns to pass me the light, or when I pass it myself to someone else, the moment when I see someone's face, perhaps unknown to me, lit up by the light of the Resurrection.

But let us not forget that Easter began with terror and amazement. Women who had followed Jesus in Galilee and cared for his needs, who had witnessed his humiliation and torture on the cross, who had witnessed where his body had been laid – after the pain and bewilderment of Good Friday, and the silence and confusion of Saturday, these women were the first to hear the Easter message: Christ is risen! They have come to seek the crucified Jesus in a place of death and defeat, and yet, in the early hours of a new day, they hear how everything has been changed forever: Christ is risen!

Yet this is not a conclusion, a happy ending to the story as Mark tells it – it is only the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1). The Gospel story will continue to unfold until Christ's second coming.

For now, the women and the disciples are called to embrace the joy and freedom of God's new creation – and yet this is not an easy life path. This path could take the disciples back to Galilee. It is a promise, and a challenge, as well.

For Galilee is the disciples' home, the place where they had lived with their families, where they had worked and prayed, where they had celebrated and mourned, where they had mixed with Gentiles (Matthew 4:15). It is the place where they had been first called by Jesus. It is the place of Jesus' ministry: it is in Galilee that he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, preached good news to the poor and release of the captives, he taught by word and deed, welcomed children, he healed the sick, consoled the broken-hearted, he shared meals with those who were rejected and forgave sinners.

“After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee”: this is Jesus' promise to his disciples (Mark 14:28). And just as he walks ahead of them, he walks ahead of us in life and in death.

He goes before us to Galilee, the place of everyday life and he wants us to continue the story that we have heard, he wants us to bring hope there. It is in our Galilee that we can experience the resurrected Christ, in every place and every moment. He meets us there to bring forgiveness and hope, healing and peace, new and abundant life. He equips us to live resurrected lives and to continue the story of God's redemption of the world.

On this night, still bearing the wounds of his suffering, the risen Christ comes to us in glory. His enduring light, passed in faith from hand to hand, can overcome

all darkness. It is offered to all, no one shall return to their Galilee without it, as we should live as resurrection people and bearers of the Easter light, as we should spread hope and love in a broken and fearful world, witnessing through our life to Christ our Risen Lord and Saviour.

For this, we need to recover the reverent awe of God's presence among us in our crucified and risen Lord, who goes before us. For this, we need to regain infectious Easter joy and take it to our Galilee. It is Christ's as he reveals the Father's love to us, his joy to be the Resurrection and the Life, to dwell among us in his Spirit, his joy to be for us our daily bread. This night, we are all invited to share in this joy.

Let us, in the words of John Chrysostom, the 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop and preacher: "Enjoy this fair and radiant festival. [...] Rich and poor, let us with one another exult. [...] Let all enjoy the feast of faith, receive all the riches of goodness.[...] Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life flourishes." (*Paschal Homily*)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!