

That is why the Vigil came first in tonight's service. We have recalled the peril from which God has plucked us, and still does, and will again... And thus the joy of the Resurrection truly bubbles up. And thus we can indeed lend our voice to the great chorus of praise: "Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels...!"



HOLY WEEK IN THE TIME OF CRISIS—

First Mass of Easter – The End of the Beginning

As you know, this evening's service takes us through no less than four separate liturgies: the Vigil, the Service of Light, our Renewal of Baptismal Vows and, here we are, in the first Mass of Easter. I hope no-one is suffering from whiplash!



The Vigil is such an important preamble, because it gives heft and substance to what follows. The Cross and Resurrection effect our salvation, but that is an idea that might gain little traction in our minds if we do not, in

truth, feel much deep need to be saved. Without a sense of the abyss, Easter can become just a happy day - a family day, perhaps, or a Spring festival – but superficial, with little emotional depth, without deep joy. The Vigil, however, reminds us of the enormity of what has menaced us, as it rehearses the long story by which God and God's people arrived at Easter day.

The Vigil reminds us of God's long work to save us, to reach us, to get through to us. It reminds us of our bondage and slavery – a socioeconomic condition which is not novel to our age, but the normal way that strong people have treated the weak through history – as well as being, by analogy, a spiritual condition. And it reminds us of God's powerful saving arm, God's interventions in history to change its direction. It reminds us of the persistent call of God, the call into loving community – into the good society, the Kingdom of God. How God keeps calling, generation after generation, even when human pride and greed keep on wrecking the project. It reminds us of how God comes to the utterly defeated, re-clothes them in flesh and breathes life into them, and then restores them to that good society that God called Israel.

The Vigil reminds us of all this, and we need the reminder if we are to celebrate Easter properly. The reminder of people's utter failure to live up to God's call, but also of God's unfailing grace and will to pick us up, begin again,

weave us back into a pattern of harmonious life. Harmony with God, through forgiveness of our sin, and harmony with one another. This is what Easter has won for us. And there is another form of remembering from which we might profit, as we give thanks for the Resurrection, which is a kind of personal and individual Vigil: the memory of our own journey to this moment. The long years that lie behind you. Years, I'm sure, scattered with grace – people who loved you, who taught you the faith. But also, for most of us, including periods when we lost the path; when we lived full of anger or despair; when we were unkind, self-righteous; years when we might very easily have got lost altogether. But through which God has kept a hand on us, shown us love, drawn us one step at a time towards the light.

Your celebration of Easter will be deeper and richer if you know from what you, personally, need to be saved. What is the particular enemy of your soul? Perhaps it's death, or the fear of death; sin, and an uneasy conscience; or a fear of futility, or of loneliness, or simply of not mattering to anyone. It is not quite the same for each of us. Allow yourself to recognise the mortal peril in which you have stood, in which perhaps you stand at this day. Dare to look in the face your own contingent, wayward self. And then turn towards the Resurrection, and you will turn with a heart so much richer, because your sense of salvation will be not an abstraction, but personal and utterly essential to your being.