

It is the greatest of joys this year to wish people a Happy Easter, and to declare 'Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed'. Last year I was flat out with Flu. I have realised as I have followed Holy Week this year how much I missed it last year. Each event: from the Passion Gospel of Palm Sunday, the singing of Compline in Holy Week, the Washing of Feet on Maundy Thursday and the challenging solemnities and deep silence of Good Friday have hit me all the more powerfully because the last time for me was two years ago.

What I do remember from last year was that I felt so ill and washed out that there was no moment when I leapt out of bed and declared myself to be better. It took ages. A wise person said to me that, at some point I would forget that I had been ill: that I would catch myself and realise that I was better; and that was the case. Well into the early summer it came to me that I was better, not tired, able to do a full day and a full week. It did take time.

Read the accounts of the resurrection very carefully. Please. Some people have done so with the mind of a detective or a lawyer, or a forensic scientist. It is good to challenge the accounts to see whether there is any other explanation than that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead; and a recent film, called 'Risen' does just that, from the perspective of a Roman soldier charged to investigate the disappearance of Jesus's body. It's hard to imagine such an efficient organisation as the Roman Empire doing anything else. Many people have cast a detailed eye over the accounts and found them to be plausible: even the fact that they differ in some details. That's what eye witnesses do. It's when they agree that you should worry.

I would also ask you to read them with an emotional and spiritual eye also. Put yourself, if you can, into the emotional shoes of Jesus's friends and followers. That's what we have been doing in Holy Week. From the amazing entry into Jerusalem, with cloaks and Palms and cheers and shouts, through to the cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the betrayal, trial and crucifixion, they have all been through utter devastation. Read then how they react to the first news of the disappearance of Jesus's body, of words spoken by angels, of Mary meeting Jesus in the garden, of the disciples walking to Emmaus, even of them meeting Jesus themselves in the evening of that first day.

They are not sure. It is not all made better. The events of the last week, of the last three years, are not simply swept away as if they had never been. It takes them ages. Listen carefully over the next few weeks as the dawning realisation hits them. It takes several meetings, eating fish by the sea shore, times with the risen Jesus in Jerusalem and Galilee, conversation after conversation. It takes 40 days, and a further ten days until Pentecost for the reality even to begin to take hold. Two or three months later Peter is able to preach, and declare Jesus to be risen from the dead, and to be the good news his people, and the whole world, were looking for.

A bit like an ill person making a recovery, the realisation of the resurrection takes time. Though the illness has gone, becoming newly healthy is a process. Your body takes some convincing. And so does this broken world. The last great battle has been fought, and death is no more. But working that out will take time, and the effects of the old illness will take time to be dealt with. The world still breaks and fractures. Devastating things still happen. Though their underlying causes have now been conquered, the reverberations still have their effect.

We should be careful then about saying that everything is better and all the bad stuff has gone. It was for this world that Christ died, and it is for this world that the resurrection should be a dawning realisation. Those still suffering the effects of illness and destruction and devastation do not need to hear that it doesn't matter any more, that it is instantly all right. Such good news takes time to dawn. We should offer this news in love and humility and hope. The resurrection began with a whisper, with uncertainty, and it grew and grew.

Jesus is alive. Pray for people like Mary uncertain in the garden, like Thomas devastated with loss. Pray for them that the resurrection will dawn. Because this is good news precisely because it takes the bad news seriously. And then pray for the day when we will forget we were ill, and when all is transformed into glory. For Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.