

Easter Sunday Reflection.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, .....

It could be a good line to start many a thriller, Chapter 1, Early on the first day of the week ....  
But in our case it begins the 20<sup>th</sup> Chapter of a book, the start of a mystery. For me the chapter could be entitled "The mystery of the empty tomb," Arthur Conan-Doyle or Agatha Christie could use such a title and build upon it.

We, knowing the story, start Easter morning shouting not Hosanna as last Sunday but Hallelujah! Not in tears but in rejoicing.

But that first Easter morning was more bewilderment than celebration. The missing body was not something to celebrate but to be disturbed by. There were tears, "Why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," replied Mary Magdalene.

This Easter is like no other in our lifetime, if not ever. No early morning service on a hillside or beach, no large church congregations gathering in song with a brightly decorated cross at the heart of worship, no counting the number of Hallelujah's sung or said in the service, no sermon cricket (that has got some of you wondering), no large family gatherings, no Easter egg hunts in the Park. It is like no other.

On an Easter Sunday like no other, treat it like no other. Read the Gospel accounts of that first Easter Day; put yourself in the occasion rather than in the celebrations we normally start with. Then you will find yourself, as I suggest in the Holy Week reflections, coming to the great understatement of all time "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." (Jn. 20:20)

The whole timing of the crucifixion at Passover meant that the normal burial and grieving process was disturbed, the anointing of the body and so forth had not happened and so the women went to the tomb to do what should have been done earlier.

The social distancing guidelines of this time have affected the way people journey through death and bereavement. It can be harder for people in grief, for they are so often isolated, unable to be supported by others with a simple hug, which offers more than words. The limited number of mourners present at a funeral changes the whole feel of the occasion; instead of, in the midst of sadness, being able to celebrate a persons life with many people gathering together in support and reminiscence there is a small group of less than 10 people widely spread in a chapel and unable to meet together after a simple ceremony.

In this time the Easter message is still the same reality; death is swallowed up in Victory; in the resurrection of Jesus all the worst that the world, and all the powers beyond the world, could throw at Jesus were taken and defeated, conquered and surpassed. He who knew no sin became sin, embraced pain and suffering, rejection and betrayal, isolation and grief, prejudice and hatred, and overcame it all by walking out of a tomb, walking through a locked door, supporting the grieving, the guilt-ridden and the bereft; offering hope and restoration, purpose and a way forward for all tomorrows.

The way we mark this Easter is different but the message is the same; Love wins!