

### Easter 2011

#### The Sun burst of Eastertide

This is a glorious Easter Week, everything is bursting with new life and energy. As I was listening to the Emmaus story this morning, I was brought back to a really special moment in my young life in Kerry. Like a recurring dream, this comes back to me every Easter Week – a vivid memory that seems to have lodged deep within me, and only emerges on a sunny afternoon in April. I'm about fourteen years old and just up after a teenage type of flu. I'm walking along the Forge Cross Road near my home, a spring sun is shining. I'm wearing a new brown suit and new brown leather shoes. To my right is John Sullivan's sloping field. To my left, the railway line that runs by the banks of the Collabha. And throughout all the decades of my life, I still feel in my body that strange and lasting delight in being so vibrantly alive.

Now why should that moment have stayed with me so vividly? What timeless thing was happening that afternoon, half a century ago, that buried itself in my loins and soul, to be awakened by the sun at the same time every year? Whatever it was – this indescribable and transforming emotion – I see it now as some kind of experience of Easter, of the abundant life. It was an Emmaus moment, of a burning heart in an awakening teenage human being.

From an early age, I have always wondered about how physical is the presence of God, how real is the actual effect of salvation on my life. What is the tangible impact of the Incarnation, of being redeemed, of being a new creation? How does it affect the way I walk and talk and listen, the way I live and move and have my being? How does it transform the way I am present to everything, to my gifts and shadows, to those I fear and admire, to the terrible sounds and sights of human destruction in a weeping world?

During the second half of my life, these questions have never left me. Throughout my life, I have come across endless witnesses to the transforming power, in the here and now, of the Paschal Mystery. In my preaching or teaching wherever appropriate, I draw attention to these experiences of Resurrection, to the places of grace. The overcoming of a fear or an addiction is surely the felt presence of the Risen Christ. So, too, is every truly new beginning after the healing of the hurt of a divorce, of a betrayal or deception. Such amazing breakthroughs, I point out, are stunning miracles of grace.

Resurrection is as earthy, local and intimate as our sweat and blood, our dreams and nightmares, our drives and passions. It is as real as whatever or whoever drives and drains us, draws and drags us. Resurrection, in fact, is the deepest meaning of everything that brings a smile to our faces, a tear to our eyes, a vitality to our bodies, a softness to our voices and a tenderness to our touch. Resurrection is as real as that.

These are the times that I see, with a painful clarity, the utter fallacy of the dualism that underpins so much of our teaching, preaching and evangelising. There are no longer two realities, the mystery of Easter convinces us – one 'merely human', the other holy; one the church, the other the world, one human, the other divine. In the baby-body of the Incarnation, in the destroyed body of the Crucifixion, in the shining, human body of the Resurrection – that is the same body in which all dualism has been transcended. To be truly human, it is now established, is to be divine. To be is to be blessed. To live is to be holy. Everything is grace.

To believe this is to be transformed into another way of perceiving our identity and our humanity. To believe this is to be subjected to a paradigm shift where we are present to ourselves and to others in an irrevocably transformed way. A veil parts. The stone is moved. The focus changes. In light of this disclosure moment, I find it so moving to believe that the lifeless and vibrant, the full and empty, the struggling and hoping people around and before me are, without doubt, the very heart of the church, the blessed sacrament of the divine presence, the only true and real presence of the living Christ of the Resurrection. God comes to us disguised as our lives. Nothing is just ordinary any more. Every bush is a burning bush. This incredible revelation is, in fact, the very mystery we celebrate at every Eucharist.

The Resurrection promises that the dry places will always burst into vibrant life, that the stone will always be rolled away, that nothing good stays dead for long. Every dream can be stirred into life, every fire re-kindled. To be sure, we all carry small graves of cynicism and despair within us. Most of us are acquainted with demons of guilt, shame and sadness. The stunning revelation of Easter is that this winter is all over, without exception and for ever. There is no sin, loss, betrayal or despair that is final. All we have to do is to choose life, forgiveness and compassion. Small wonder that the Celts of old saw the sun dancing over the mountains on Easter morning.

The sun should dance for us, too. Everything is now new and fresh. Our lives are transformed. We have just come through the amazing ceremonies of Holy Week. At the Vigil, there is a deliberate assault on the senses, those senses that we call the thresholds of the soul. It is all intensely physical, emotional and spiritual. Every liturgical stop is pulled out to ensure that we do not forget the glimpse we have been given of the meaning of the mystery. Easter then, like Christmas, like Baptism, like Eucharist is the celebration of the body in its wholeness set free – that human, sacred body of ours which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and which will live, in its entirety, with the still-shining, wounded body of Jesus in heaven, for ever.

During Eastertide, we are called again to those threshold- senses of ours by the church in a most extraordinary way, when the story of the strong physical presence of Jesus, holding the bread and wine over the table in the tavern, explodes the Emmaus-bound disciples from their doubt, and, before that, provides the same release, when the probing finger of the doubting Thomas explores the broken skin of the still-human Christ. Like him, we must dare to believe. Let us imagine the following life-giving whisper coming from the living gospel within our hurting hearts:

I am the Spirit of the Risen Christ. If you dare to believe it, I can set free the dance in your body, the music in your soul, the dream in your heart. You can overcome every fear – with me: you can forgive every hurt – with me: you can make your life a journey of wonder – with me. With your bodies you can worship each other – with me. Every hope you carry inside you can come true – because with me you can do all things. You can mend a broken world because now, everything is possible. Heaven on earth lies open before you today for the taking. But there is one condition to this glorious transformation – of you, of humanity and of all creation – you must dare to believe it.