

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 31st March –

Enlarging our vision of Easter Hope

Too often we regard Holy Week, the Stations of the Cross, the ceremonies of the Triduum, as having to do with the salvation of our own souls only. There is a persistent tendency in many of us towards a private kind of religion. Irish Catholics of a certain age are prone to confine the mystery of redemption to a personal transaction between God and the individual.

Heavily influenced by a flawed and limited grasp of a theology of sin and redemption, many of us failed to see salvation as a communal matter for all God's people, reaching into the heart of the world itself. The liturgical experience of Good Friday and Easter Sunday is intended to lead us, not into a flight from the world into heaven, but to a sense of responsibility, with God, for saving the world, for transforming it into a new creation. In his second encyclical *Spe Salvi* (Saved by Hope) Pope Benedict wrote that Christians had ignored Christ's message that true Christian hope involves salvation for all. We focus instead, he said, on individual salvation rather than on 'a city of communal salvation . . . No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone.'

There is rich width and depth in the vision of this encyclical. 'God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us, and humanity in its entirety.' The seeds of Easter are unlimited and they blossom everywhere. That is the reason for our hope.

The mystery of the Incarnation can only be taken literally. Its implications for the world are real beyond any doubt. When God became human, humanity itself was transformed. When the Word became flesh, the whole world became utterly full of God – God's flesh, God's body, God's essence, God's redemption. Given that this universality is the non-negotiable story of Christian redemption and hope.

We need to enlarge our vision so as to continue hoping for, and believing in, the salvation of our strange and beautiful world. Here are some questions to ponder on during this season of our salvation: *Are we guilty of confining and restricting Jesus to a religious sphere only? Where in the wider world, in the light of Easter, do we look for, and recognise Jesus now? Does an individualistic, fragmented and over-personal understanding of sin and salvation blind us to the wider picture of a universal call to responsibility and transformation? What tone and language are we using when we address all people and their burdens in a pluralistic world of rapid change and threat?*

In the Easter Vigil we pray, '*. . . bring lasting salvation to humanity so that the world may see the fallen lifted up, the old made new, and all things brought to their rightful place . . . you shall be my people and I will be your God.*' This is our story of hope as Christians. It is the story of Easter. It is the fleshed reality of the Incarnation. '*For when Jesus rose from the dead,*' wrote Sebastian Moore in his recent *The Contagion of Jesus*, '*he rose into everybody, and into the whole universe, to be the cosmic Christ.*' It is up to us, now, to complete that resurrection.

(Extract from an article in 'Reality' magazine)