



Dear Parishioners,

It is a very strange Holy Week, when we cannot meet and celebrate together the services of the Easter Triduum. However, we can be united in prayer – and many of you will have the opportunity to watch the services of the Triduum live streamed from Holy Ghost. Below, Fr Richard offers a brief reflection, as we prepare for Easter.

'The Resurrection', by Piero della Francesca

For my email this week, as we prepare to celebrate Easter Sunday, I thought I couldn't do better than to share with you one of my favourite pictures, 'The Resurrection' by Piero della Francesca. I have always loved this painting, and was privileged to see it for myself a few years ago, when I visited the town of Sansepolcro in Tuscany where it is on display.

Christ rises out of the Tomb, very early on Easter morning – the sky is a pale blue, but the guards are still fast asleep. The risen Lord is a majestic figure – the artist depicts Him rather like one of the pagan gods of antiquity - strong, athletic, triumphant. Yet He still bears the wounds of the Crucifixion – if we look closely we can see them, on His hands, His feet and His side. Christ might have triumphed over death, yet He can still empathise with those who are weak and suffering.

Behind Jesus, we see a rural landscape - the rolling hills of Tuscany, with which the artist would have been so familiar. But the scene is also full of symbolism. To the left of the painting the trees are dead and lifeless – to the right, they have become verdant and full of life. This is the effect of the Resurrection – in place of death and sadness, life and hope now reign.

As we celebrate Easter this year, 2020, the world is still firmly in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here in our own country, the disease is expected to peak at just about this time. Elsewhere in Europe, there may be signs of hope, as casualty numbers seem to be falling, and in places lockdown restrictions begin to be lifted. Elsewhere, notably in the poorest parts of the world, it is to be feared that the disease will still exact a terrible toll among nations ill-equipped to cope.

In this situation, it is easy to become despondent. But let us try to focus on the Easter message of hope. Hope is a very necessary, but often almost forgotten virtue. It tells us that, yes, life may at times be difficult, almost overwhelming – yet God never forgets us. He is always near, always ready to help – and if we call on

Him, He will never abandon us. In Piero della Francesca's beautiful painting, we see someone who has suffered horribly, and been put to death in the cruellest way imaginable – yet here He rises again, serene and triumphant, inviting us to put our faith and our trust in Him. As we celebrate the Lord's resurrection this Easter Day, let us respond to that invitation, and place all our hope in Christ.

A mediation from the Divine Office

The Divine Office gives us these words of Melito of Sardis, who was a bishop in Asia Minor, and one of the Church Fathers, dying around 180 AD. Though he lived so many centuries earlier, his words seem a perfect meditation on Piero della Francesca's painting – both invite us to reflect on Jesus, who is both God and man – who has suffered, and yet triumphs over death.

“Though Lord, He became man; He suffered for those who were suffering, He was bound for the captive, judged for the condemned, buried for the one who was buried; He rose from the dead and cried out: ‘Who shall contend with me? Let him stand up to face me. I have freed the condemned, brought the dead to life, raised up the buried. Who will speak against me?’ ‘I am the Christ’, He says, ‘It is I who destroyed death, who triumphed over the enemy, who trampled Hades underfoot, who bound the strong one and snatched man away to the heights of heaven; I am the Christ.’

‘Come then, all you nations of men defiled by sin, receive the forgiveness of sin. For it is I who am your forgiveness, the pasch of your salvation, the lamb slain for you; it is I who am your ransom, your life, your resurrection, your light, your salvation, your king. I am bringing you to the heights of heaven, I will show you the Father who is from all eternity, I will raise you up with my right hand.’”

We hope you and your families are keeping safe and well. Father Richard and Father Tom wish you all a very happy and blessed Easter.