

SUNDAY APRIL 18TH 2021

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER.

About today's Readings

Today's Gospel reading reveals to us how more of the followers of Jesus came to experience his resurrection, and so to believe in it. The men who had encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus had returned to Jerusalem, and were still telling the other disciples the details of what had happened, when Jesus suddenly "stood among them".

The authenticity of what happened is clear from what we are told. The sight of the risen Jesus is described as being alarming and frightening, and certainly not some sort of illusion or wishful thinking on the part of the disciples. They were "agitated" and "dumbfounded" and "they could not believe it" - and rather than welcoming the risen Jesus with great joy and acceptance, it is almost as if they needed to be shaken out of their disbelief. So Jesus invites them to touch him, and to give him something to eat. He shows them that he is no spirit or figment of the imagination, but real, and raised in his flesh. And there continues to be a stunned lack of understanding among the disciples, even though they are also overcome with wonder and joy.

Perhaps the greatest proof that all this is real, though, lies in the way the disciples responded to the resurrection in the way they lived their future lives. Jesus says to them: "You are witnesses to this." They are witnesses that Jesus is the Christ who suffered and died, and rose again for the forgiveness of sins for all people. And that is precisely what the disciples then did: they witnessed not just by their words, but also by their actions, even to the point of devoting their entire lives to share this astounding news with the whole world.

For us here and now - our faith needs to have similar characteristics to the faith of those first disciples - firstly the honesty to admit the doubts and difficulties and struggles which we sometimes have in our faith and in our Christian journey; and secondly a readiness to see for ourselves - to feel him, to touch him, and to encounter his love and his presence among us. Like those first disciples, we are called to bear witness to the truth that the cross of Jesus is the way to life: we are not to deny his death, but rather to affirm that he shows us the way to life precisely by his dying.

There are no short-cuts to the struggle for faith, or to achieving that personal encounter with Jesus; but we are called to be his witnesses today; and in our lives to reveal his values and his truths and his risen life, to all people. Today's first two readings also stress the importance of coming to faith, and the possibility of a complete change of direction and change of heart, which God makes possible for those who come to him in faith, regardless of their past. Peter makes it quite clear that forgiveness is possible even for those who had Jesus put to death.

Some prayers for today, and for the week ahead.

We give thanks for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and we pray that we may continue to encounter the risen Lord for ourselves, and to bear witness to his love by the way we live and act, and serve other people.

We pray for those who find it hard to believe, or who have been damaged by doubt and uncertainty: may the words spoken by Jesus of hope and new life, become a reality in their lives and in the lives of us all.

We pray for ELIZABETH our Queen as our Sovereign and Head of State; and we pray for all in authority under her; for all in public life and in positions of influence and power; and for all who are driving the political and the medical agendas for us, and for our country and for the wider world. We also pray for the Queen and her family, now that the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh has taken place; and we pray that the Royal Family may receive comfort from one another, and comfort from the sympathy and prayers of the country and the Commonwealth and beyond.

We give thanks that we have come safely to the next stage of an ordered return to a more normal way of life. We pray for sense and restraint on the part of all people as restrictions become eased; and we pray for all who are now able to start their working or business lives again. And we pray especially for those who have been hard-hit financially during Lockdown, and all who face uncertainties and painful decisions about their future.

We pray for a speedy and appropriate sending of a new Priest to take the pastoral charge of our parish; for all who will now be involved in the process of discerning and appointing; and for a readiness to welcome that person.

We pray for the police, the judiciary, and all forces of law and order; and we pray that the current issues of safety in the community, and the dangers of violence and attack, and racial and social harmony, and also peace and stability in Northern Ireland, may all be wisely and successfully tackled and resolved.

We pray for the sick: Anne Barber, Beth Beecham, Gerry Bond, Anne Carter, Lizzie Checkley, Carole Cresswell, Janet Dann, Peter Davey, Sue Davis, Carolyn Drew, Julie Evans, Kieran Hooper, Jill, Rene Leufgen, Jack Luscombe, Stephen Luscombe, Jackie Lynch, Mike Hammett, Pamela Macey, Diane Squires, Kathryn Tregenna, Lena Tucker, Verity, Duncan Walters and Rita White.

We pray for those who have died recently, including those who have died of the Covid-19 Pandemic locally here, and also in any part of the world. We remember especially His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh. More locally, we pray for Christopher Dauntton (Exeter), Thomas Houghton (Torquay) and Jules, who have recently died. And we also pray for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time. (No names this week.)