

**EASTER VIGIL 2015**  
**ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM**  
**By, Archbishop Bernard Longley**

*You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen.*

Eyes that are searching have found what they long to see tonight. In the midst of the darkness the People of Israel have kept vigil awaiting the coming of the Messiah. We have accompanied them as we listened to the account of their longing in our sequence of scripture readings. Their long journey of faith, still searching for the promised land where the Lord's anointed will reign, echoes our own pilgrimage of faith as we continue to search with longing eyes for Christ in the midst of our own darkness.

In recounting the history of salvation from the narrative of creation in the Book of Genesis, through the Exodus account of their deliverance from Egypt to find the promised land, to the establishment of their covenant with God, we have identified ourselves with the people who first learnt to look with longing eyes for the coming of the Lord. In yesterday's intercession we prayed *for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God. We asked that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption.*

In the darkness of night our eyes become sensitive to the smallest glimmers of light. As we listened with humility to the readings from the Old Testament, we recognised the light of Christ that had already begun to shine through the events of Israel's history and in the insights of the prophets and seers. We must always be grateful for the Father's abiding choice of the Jewish people, enabling the revelation of his love to become a reality for us to see in Christ.

We see because we are created in the image and likeness of God who *saw that light was good.* God created day and night, heaven and earth and seas, plants and trees and every living creature and *God saw that it was good. God saw all that he had made and indeed it was very good.*

We have been created with that capacity to see and to see the goodness in all that God has made. Yesterday we looked up at Christ on the cross and, lowering our eyes, we kissed the wood of his cross. We saw the suffering and the love that enabled our Lord to endure an agonising death for our sake. Eyes that have witnessed great suffering acquire a depth and a compassion that longs to bear fruit for others. Eyes saddened by inhumanity long to see loving-mercy. Eyes that have witnessed death are searching for signs of life.

In the darkness of our Vigil we have kindled a flame – carried the Paschal candle in procession with the light of Christ before us. We have acknowledged the risen Lord as the true source of light for the world and as the one for whom we all long, for whom we have been created with eyes that are searching for him. Archbishop Patrick reminded us,

in his beautiful and moving homily yesterday, that we are united with all those who have been looking for Christ with eager eyes and we are not disappointed.

St Mark's Gospel is shot through with this sense of longing. We are drawn into the restlessness and longing that have kept Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Salome awake and waiting with eyes searching for the first light of dawn: *very early in the morning...they went to the tomb, just as the sun was rising*. Nature's gift of dawn is a pale reflection of the rising that they will witness.

The darkness of fear and sadness has clouded their vision, *but when they looked they could see that the stone...had already been rolled back*. Their questioning of one another and their uncertainty about how to reach into the tomb have preoccupied their thoughts until looking at the stone alerts them to another, greater reality. Why has the stone been moved – who has shifted the obstacle they expected to impede them? The more they look, the less they see, the more they wonder.

Four times the evangelist invites us to see alongside these three women, the first witnesses to the empty tomb. They saw the stone, they *saw a young man in a white robe*, their eyes followed his bidding when he said: *See, here is the place where they laid him* and they remembered his instructions for Peter and the disciples: *He has risen...He is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him, just as he told you*.

We can sympathise with the three women – what they saw dazzled them and they needed time to absorb its meaning. They were perplexed on seeing the stone, *they were struck with amazement* at seeing the young man, and they *ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid*. Longing eyes are not always ready for what they see and need time to discern its meaning.

Tonight eight pairs of longing eyes are watching the narrative of this Vigil unfold for the first time as they prepare to receive the gifts of the risen Lord. Four catechumens will enter the waters of baptism so that dying with Christ they may rise to new life with him. Four Christians from other traditions will enter into full communion with the Catholic Church through the anointing of Confirmation. Tonight you see the Lord in a new way and he gives you a re-kindled lamp for your feet and a light for your path as you become part of the Catholic Church's long pilgrimage of faith.

For each one of us, the eyes that have looked on the wood of the cross, at the Easter fire and Paschal candle, and that will see the pouring of baptismal water and the anointing with Chrism, are themselves a symbol of the inner eyes of faith, illuminating the infinite recesses of the soul. That is where Christ's light shines at its most powerful and it is there that the presence of the risen Christ becomes radiant within us. It is a light that will shine forever, beyond our fears and disappointments, beyond our suffering and sadness and infinitely beyond the shadow of the grave.

The Dominican theologian, Fr Paul Murray, expresses this truth most vividly, and most fittingly for this Easter night, in his poem *Rising*.

*Over the still  
earth, the sun that  
is rising now*

*is the sun  
that was rising  
before we were born*

*and will be rising  
after we are dead.  
And we, too, as it*

*dawns, revive. For  
even as these  
mists and fears*

*recede, shining now  
above the dark  
earth of the mind,*

*above the void,  
three stars within us  
rise, three*

*moving suns: passion,  
wakefulness, joy.  
And can such living*

*flame, such radiance  
be born from dust  
to return to dust?*

May the light of the risen Christ continue to burn brightly within us these fifty days of Easter and beyond.