

A Time To Reflect – April 2021

The question is sometimes asked: which Feast of the Church's year is more important: Christmas or Easter?

It is a fair question, because Christmas is a far bigger celebration in the eyes of the world.

To hedge your bets, one might be inclined to argue that you can't have one without the other and that to put them in order of importance is unhelpful.

But what about looking at it like this:

Christmas celebrates the Incarnation, the Word of God taking on our human nature and living among us. Truly amazing.

Easter takes us from identifying with Jesus in his humanity to being promised a share in his death and resurrection: being saved and redeemed.

If Jesus, the Son of God, had become one of us: his ministry and his mission would have been quite impressive. But had it all ended with his death, we would not now be talking about him, believing in him, celebrating him.

So, we have an answer to the question: which is more important – Christmas or Easter? Well, connected as they are and inseparable, Easter is the supreme celebration in the Church's Year because it brings to fulfilment the mission of Christ: Death and Resurrection, Risen Life, Ascension into Heaven and the Sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the culmination of the Easter Mystery.

And here's another question: why is it that Lent is 40 days but Easter is 50 days, and yet we seem much more inclined to keep and mark the 40 days by prayer, fasting and almsgiving than we are to celebrate and rejoice for the 50 days that follow.

Are we simply more aware of our tendency to sin?

During the mysteries of Holy Week and Easter leading to the 50 days of the Easter Season, maybe we can ponder whether our focus on Lent more than Easter is also to do with the more obvious prayers we make in times of need than in times of thanksgiving.

Easter 2021 is still not out of the woods in terms of the health of the nation, but it is a much more hopeful place than Easter 2020 when lockdown had just begun, and we were all really struggling with so many things and the changes that we felt were being imposed.

Are we any the wiser now?

When we feel a bit fed up with the lockdown and restrictions on our movement and on our ability to socialise as we might wish, have we gained any insight into: What it is for those who are alone outside of the pandemic and how we can address the needs of our brothers and sisters in the future?

What it is to experience inconvenience – even long term inconvenience – if we have been fortunate not to have been too deeply affected in our long term health?

Have Pope Francis' sentiments spoken to us: going 'back to normal' is not such a good place to return to if it means re-establishing inequality, failing to recognise the imbalance of the world's resources and sometimes conveniently forgetting my neighbour because the busyness of my life is too full to be an effective witness to Christian charity. It can always wait?

Returning to the subject of Christmas and Easter, there is a very important connection to make at Easter: the humility and humiliation with which the only Son of God was born in squalor in Bethlehem – not quite the reception that we might have wanted for the Messiah, but it was God's chosen way.

And at Easter, the humbling and humiliating death of a common criminal – not so much at the hands of 'those people at the time in Jerusalem' but of sinful humanity: *he came to his own domain and his own people did not receive him.*

This Easter, as we walk with Jesus on his Road to the Cross, witnessing to the poignant moments of the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the Silence of the Saturday and the Joy of Easter Day, the ceremonies and celebrations of Holy Week can never leave us unmoved or unchanged.

Having fulfilled our Lenten journey, let us walk with Christ and stand at the foot of the Cross witnessing to him as he shows his ultimate act of love for his brothers and sisters – so that we might change our lives.

And let the Alleluias not fade throughout the 50 days of Eastertide!