

Happy Easter!

When compared with Christmas, Easter seems to come off second-best. No Carols by Candlelight on the television; no community concerts; no decorations in the street; no family gatherings for special meals. And, thank goodness, no television and radio ads trying to convince us that the ‘real meaning’ of the festival is buying lots and lots of things that we don’t need and probably can’t afford as a sign of our love for our family and friends.

For the outside world, Christmas is the big feast. But we know that it is Easter, not Christmas, which is the greatest festival of the Church’s year. We celebrate with great joy the incarnation; God coming to us as the baby in the manger. We celebrate with even greater joy the resurrection; God in Christ defeating death.

Over the past week I have conducted two funerals. At every burial, as I stand by the grave, I say the centuries’ old words: “We now commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, was buried, and rose again for us.” It is Easter and the resurrection that gives us this “sure and certain hope” that death is not the end.

At Easter we celebrate Christ’s defeat of violence and oppression and hatred and darkness and death, and the birth of peace and justice and love and light and life. This is the centre of the Christian faith; this is what we celebrate at Easter; this is why Easter is the most important event in the Christian calendar.

Christ is risen; He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Risen in quiet and mysterious darkness
before the chorus of the dawn.
Alleluia, Christ is risen;
He is risen indeed.

Risen with glory and grace in reserve,
and authority beyond measure.
Alleluia, Christ is risen;
He is risen indeed.

Risen to prove that violence is no solution;
to offer us peace and life in all its fullness.
Alleluia, Christ is risen;
He is risen indeed.

For God has taken into his own flesh
the sin of the world.
The last laugh is God’s laugh;
God has the last laugh:
For freedom comes beyond the cross,
for peace comes beyond violence,
for friendship comes beyond the betrayal.
For life comes beyond the crushing of life.

The first laugh and the last laugh are God’s.
And God has made laughter for us.
Alleluia, Christ is risen;
He is risen indeed.¹

¹ David Coleman, ‘God has made laughter for us,’ in Ruth Burgess and Chris Polhill (ed.), *Eggs and ashes: Practical and liturgical resources for Lent and Holy Week*, p. 224.

I want to end by sharing with you a story that I told at the Easter Sunday at Romsey last year. It is a story first told by Madeleine L'Engle, one of my favourite authors and it is about something that happened in Red Square in Moscow, not long after the establishment of the USSR. She writes:

The people of Moscow were called to a gathering in Red Square. There they were addressed by one of the new leaders, who spent well over half an hour proving to the populace that there is no God. His factual arguments about the non-existence of God were incontrovertible, and the mob of people standing in Red Square was silent and subdued.

Then a priest who was standing with the people asked permission to say three words. Permission was granted, and he stood in front of the packed square, raised his arms, and cried out:

“CHRIST IS RISEN!”

And the entire mob responded joyfully, “He is risen indeed!”²

(Plus, chocolate (eggs and rabbits/bilbies) is much tastier than Christmas mince pies and shortbread!)

² Madeleine L'Engle, *The Rock That Is Higher*, p. 294.