2017 Easter Homily

Those of you who were able to attend our reconciliation service on Monday will remember that it was loosely modelled on an ancient monastic service called *Tenebrae*, meaning *shadows*. The service opens with a large candelabra, full of burning candles. One by one these are extinguished with the exception of the central candle. Rather than being extinguished this candle is temporarily removed from sight and restored to view as the service reaches its climax.

This service had quite an impact on a Jesuit priest called George Tyrrell who got himself into hot water for not fully towing the line when the Church was going through a particularly strict regime. Tyrrell the imagery of the candles going out as a metaphor for many of life’s losses and sadness; how as we progress through life we seem to be abandoned piece by piece and left bereft of support. A feeling that those closest to Jesus must surely have experienced when they saw him crucified and buried.

But, at the same time as he acknowledges these feelings; Tyrrell also recognises that Christ is the one light that is never entirely extinguished; the one who remains as our signal in the midst of darkness. This is how he puts it:

*As at Tenebrae, one after another the lights are extinguished, until one alone – at that the highest of all - is left. So it is often with the soul and her guiding stars. In our early years there are many – parents, teachers, friends, books, authorities – but as life goes on, one by one they fail and leave us in deepening darkness, with an increasing sense of the mystery and inexplicability of all things, till at last none but the figure of Christ stands out luminous against the prevailing night.*

The *Easter Candle* stands tall in the centre of our church this and every Easter to bear witness to this same Christ. One who is our guiding light even on our journey through the gates of death.

The smallest planet that *The Little Prince* visits is inhabited by a solitary lamplighter. He is kept constantly busy lighting and extinguishing a single lamp because there are 1440 sunsets every 24 hours.

“It may be well that this man is absurd.” said the Little Prince. “But at least his work has some meaning. When he lights his street lamp, it is as if he brought one more star to life, or one flower. When he puts out his lamp, he sends the flower, or the star, to sleep. That is a beautiful occupation. And since it is beautiful, it is truly useful.”

The prince goes on to explain why the lamplighter’s job is both “beautiful” and “useful.” It is “useful” because his diligence shows that he is mindful of others not just himself and this is “beautiful”.

And this says the prince, is what makes the lamplighter friend material.

Such is the calling of all who are baptised, all who receive a lighted candle (or luminous bracelet).

Each Easter invites us to renew our willingness and personal delight in living out this calling. None of us are immune to the losses and disappointments. These are part of every human life marked by love. But we are called to be friend material to one another, bearers of light in moments of darkness; witnesses to the resurrection that conquers death’s grip on our ultimate destiny.

Years ago, when the street lights had to be lit and extinguished by hand, a lamplighter was asked if he ever grew weary of his work. After all, it was a lonely job and many nights were cold and damp.

"I am never cheerless," said the old lamplighter, "for there is always a light ahead of me to lead me on." But what do you have to cheer you when you have put out the last light?" he was asked. "Then comes the dawn," he said.

To which we say: Alleluia! ©pcm 2017