

EASTER2 2019

The future is more beautiful than all the pasts.

Teilhard de Chardin

Those who have attended an Easter Vigil will know that it opens with the blessing of a fire from which the new Easter Candle will be lit. The candle itself is prepared by being ritually inscribed with a cross, the numerals of the current calendar year and five studs marking the wounds inflicted on the crucified Christ. And at the head and foot of the cross we find the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the Alpha and the Omega.

These letters carry a special significance in the Book of Revelation from which today's second reading is drawn. Before telling us that his visions occurred, during a period of exile on the island of Patmos, John assures us that he is not standing aloof from the very real concerns and experiences of his readers and listeners. The Book of the Revelation may be written in the apocalyptic style, but its purpose is to address the questions that flow from believing in Christ even

when life is tough, and our questions continue to multiply.

So, John shares a vision in which Christ appears to him as one who transcends time and space. And the message he hears opens with the words: “Do not be afraid, it is I the First and the Last, the Living One...” and he instructs John not to confine his thinking to the past but to look closely at the present moment and anticipate a future worth longing and preparing for.

This is timely advice for our own age. We live in a very disputatious world one in which some of the securities and certainties of previous generations are being challenged. In times like this there is a real temptation to try and reimpose or reclaim the past. Nostalgia for former glories and successes can be a very heady brew; let's batten down the hatches raise the draw bridge and return to formers ways. Such advice can be very attractive, but it is born of fear and anxiety and it saps us of the courage that will open our minds to new ways and the discovery of new blessings.

When John's Christ identifies himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, we are reminded that the Second Person of the Trinity has, is and always will be transforming the world and carrying it beyond past failures and present trials.

Rather like John who had his visions during his exile, in the 1920's a French Jesuit was sent away from Paris University by his superiors because he had begun to teach and write about Christ in ways that challenged the status quo. During his time in the far East the young Teilhard de Chardin wrote his insights down in a manuscript that was not published until after his death. It is very different from the Book of Revelation in that it uses very different images and styles. Teilhard was a palaeontologist, he studied at the fossils of creatures that walked the planet long before Jesus of Nazareth; but rather than undermining his faith it broadened and projected it forwards as well as backwards in time. All of this found expression in his writings, particularly in the above referenced book eventually published as

The Divine Milieu which has been described by one reviewer as:

“...utterly contemporary and revolutionary—different from any other spiritual book you ever read—it is Christian in its roots and to its core. It is joyful, hopeful, and full of enthusiasm, as any Christian spirituality should be. It expresses a love for nature, a delight in scientific discoveries, a rejoicing in human progress, and an underlying almost childlike trust in a benevolent universe evolving in the unconditional love of a benevolent and all-forgiving God.”

At its core is a deep sense of trust in Christ’s eternal presence, summoning all creation to union with God. While some imagine that the influence of the Christ who died on the cross is receding as the ages pass, Teilhard contends that the best is yet to come. In his own words: “the future is more beautiful than all the pasts.”

This is the same hope that we echo each time we gather for the Eucharist and acknowledge that we await the blessed hope and coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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