

Pluscarden Abbey: Homilies

Easter Sunday 2009

Towards the end of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, there comes a memorable moment. Frodo, the hobbit-bearer of the Ring of Power, has fulfilled his task. The Ring has gone back into the fire, and the Kingdom of Mordor, of evil and death, has imploded. It is "the end of all things." Both Frodo and his faithful companion Sam now expect to die, and collapse exhausted as Mount Doom dissolves around them.

And then some morning later, in the second week of April, Sam wakes up. To his astonishment "he found that he was lying on some soft bed", and "over him gently swayed wide beechen boughs, and through their young leaves sunlight glimmered, green and gold. All the air was full of a sweet scent." Then, more astonished, he sees Frodo asleep in the bed beside him. Then he hears a voice behind him, the voice of his beloved Master Gandalf. "Well, Master Samwise, how do you feel?" "But Sam lay back, and stared with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself.'" And then Sam asks, musing aloud: "Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?" (The Return of the King, p. 930).

This is fiction, fantasy, of course, though from a Christian pen and informed by a Christian vision. But take that question: Is everything sad going to come untrue? It's the question a child might ask. It isn't a fictional question.

Is everything sad going to come untrue?

And this morning, Easter morning, the morning of the Resurrection, Peter speaking in the Acts, Paul writing to the Corinthians, Mary Magdalene singing in the Sequence, John in his Gospel, all these voices of apostolic testimony, give their answer. The empty tomb outside Jerusalem and the neatly-folded head-cloth offer their answer. The Paschal candle, the chant of Alleluia, the beauty of the Liturgy give their answer. Our own presence here, our faith, aren't they an answer too? All those throughout the world who were baptised and confirmed and made their first Communion last night stand up and speak. The Church throughout the world and throughout the ages, the white-robed army of martyrs and so many humble, stubborn believers, hoppers against hope, give their answer.

Is everything sad going to come untrue?

On the basis, not of wishful thinking, not of sentimentalizing, but of faith in the Resurrection, we answer today, it is. In Christ, who in obedience and love has gone before us, it already has. And if, we by faith and baptism are found in Christ, everything sad will come untrue for us as well, and at root already has.

The kingdom of Mordor, the power of sin and death, has already been broken. The end of all things has already come. Something has happened to the world. This is precisely what the New Testament claims for the Resurrection. A mutation, as Pope Benedict has often said, has taken place. In the person of Christ, one of our race has been changed from mortality to immortality, has entered into unconquerable overflowing life. And this "one of us", because he is Son of God and can carry us all, has opened the way for all of us to what the Creed calls, so soberly, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. He, the risen Son of God, will one day mutate, transfigure, our own mortal bodies, and his already risen life can live in us now as forgiveness, as faith, hope and love, as prayer and peace, making us children of God, sons and daughters in the Son, brothers and sisters of one another.

There is only one ground, I have always thought, for not believing in the Resurrection of Christ. However unique and extraordinary an event it was, it is sufficiently well-attested, and the arguments against the evidence in its favour do not hold. There is no violation of our reason in believing it. The Resurrection is credible. Then, the light it sheds on life, the vision of reality it throws open, the meaning and purpose it gives to everything, the power it can have in lives make it still more so. The real difficulty, the real challenge - in my view - lies elsewhere. It lies in it being, as we say, "too good to be true." I once asked a man, "Why can you not believe?" I have never forgotten his answer. "My hands are too small." There is the difficulty. Is everything sad going to come untrue? How hard that can be to answer with a 'yes'! We are so wedded to, so steeped in, so expectant of the sad, and the more than sad; so at home in "quiet desperation". Yet doesn't the best of our experience suggest something else: that the truest issue of suffering, sorrow, sadness is not a cramping of the heart, but its

opening, an enlargement of the capacity for joy? And the man who spoke of his small hands did come back to the faith of his childhood, and in gratitude that Easter filled this church with flowers. The Holy Spirit, the Joy of God in person, can enlarge our hands to accept the joy, or, if you like, re-open in us the open heart of a child.

Christ is risen. He is truly risen! And so we can say even now: everything sad will come untrue. We have a sure and certain hope.

“‘A great Shadow has departed,’ said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed” (op. cit. pp. 930-1).

Christ is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia.

Abbot Hugh, O. S. B.