

## Living the resurrection liturgically

Some years back Rosemary Crumlin, a Parramatta Sister of Mercy, curated an exhibition of religious art for the National Gallery of Victoria. Outstanding for me amongst the pieces was one that offered shock. It was an arch with the following German words inscribed: *ich habe angst* - 'I am afraid'. The initial shock was that this was a depiction of the resurrection! The bigger shock was how true it was to the scriptures: the first reaction of that apostolic band of women and men was fear, though the truth be told the narratives have the men more accomplished at it than the women. Across the resurrection passages of Matthew and Luke we hear of fear, some joy, being terrified, amazement but incomprehension, and doubt. The risen Jesus brings them to face their feelings: *Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts* (Lk 24:38).

It is against this background of fear and terror that the prime liturgical symbol of the resurrection makes itself clear. It is the symbol of light. Christ is the light of the world, a light no longer hidden under a bushel basket, but brilliant in the darkness so that all can see. The Easter candle, blessed beside an open fire to be solemnly lit from the naked dancing flames, and then processed into the expectant church, is a single flame of hope. Soon in the Easter vigil the same darkened church will be awash with candles aflame and then full light, all inspired by this single lighted wick.

Throughout the period of Easter the candle will remain lit, while the 'alleluias' ring out at every turn. Then as the season recedes its potent symbol will be set next to the baptismal font, sealing in our hearts and minds the deepest of links between baptism and resurrection, the going down into the grave and rising up out of it.

To live the resurrection is first and foremost to seek the light, to be in the light and to become the light. How do we live this? In 2005 the Social Justice Sunday Statement of the Catholic Bishops was a meditation on 'Jesus, Light for the World'. It began like this:

*It was the fourth-last house at the edge of the town as the highway headed south. The family that lived there has small children so that was always a light on somewhere in case one of the little ones was a bit sick or afraid. That practical light brought some calm to the home and a feeling of safety. But it could be seen from the outside too. Some nights a stranger in need would call, drawn by the light and thinking if there was a light on then there was someone awake who could help. And the husband and wife would have to wake and decide whether to answer, knowing that the light that kept the children secure had attracted others in distress or possible danger.*

And here is the dilemma of the Easter light, one that the not so gallant apostolic band may have intuited and drawn back from. The light of Christ which guides and excites us enables us to see. The true light of Christ uncovers illness and insecurity, and calls us to act. But it also means that we can be seen, and so draw to ourselves challenges and strangers in need.

The poor reactions to the responses of officials in our church to sexual abuse allegations and revelations, especially from Ireland, Germany and the Vatican need to be seen in context of the Light. There is little point in blaming poor media skills by the church or of mooting a treacherous campaign by the media. Rather we need to look closely at how we, as a church together, act when the light is turned on our actions in the face of abuse, violence and criminal behaviour. The vulnerable were brought into the care of the church because it was recognized as a place of light. There are many indications that we have often been more concerned with the welfare of the candle than what the flame was allowing us the opportunity to see.

And so back to the Easter candle. It is a symbol of Christ, the light who continually challenges us to see and be a light. Perhaps it is also a reminder that we share much in common with the apostles, and respond with our own brand of fear, incomprehension and anxiety. Perhaps we can dwell on the closing words from the Bishops in 2005:

*As the people of God and the disciples of Jesus, we are to bring hope in our actions for justice, our advocacy for the poor, our care for the earth, our encouragement of our brothers and sisters and our rejection of pessimism. In this we build the Kingdom of God and are privileged to gaze on God's face in the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the naked and the stranger.*

In this then "may Christ be our light."

For the 2005 Statement *Jesus, Light of the World*, see [http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/documentation/documentation\\_sjs01.html](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/documentation/documentation_sjs01.html) and click on the 2005 link

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