



Homily for Easter Sunday

21st April 2019

Cardiff Cathedral: St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Archbishop George Stack

Dennis Potter was a very controversial English playwright who died at the age of 59 in 1994. Shortly after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, he was interviewed by Melvyn Bragg on the South Bank Show. He told of looking out of his window in Ross on Wye and saying *“The season is in full bloom now. Looking at the white apple blossom tree, instead of saying ‘Oh that’s a nice blossom’ I see it as the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom there ever could have been ... The newness of everything is absolutely wondrous”*.

Those words came to my mind in the last few days when I have seen hundreds of people in Bute Park, enjoying the sunshine, playing on the grass, admiring the flowers. It reminded me that truths of Easter are illustrated by three different gardens in the bible. The first garden is Eden, in the Book of Genesis. It never was a real garden, of course, but Eden speaks of our true relationship with God and with his creation. Ecological awareness and responsibility isn’t a new discovery of the climate change demonstrators in London! Adam symbolises humanity, not least in our role as stewards of God’s creation. But because of our self-centred view of life and love, and in the exploitation which is the heart of every sin, we are no longer in harmony either with ourselves, with nature or with God himself. We are cast out of the garden.

The second garden is real enough. It is Gethsemane. In that garden, Jesus the second Adam battles with the human desire to avoid suffering at all costs. *“Father, if this cup can pass me by ... but yet not my will but thine be done”*. The freely made sacrificial death of Jesus on the tree of the cross, reverses the disobedience of Adam, of sinful humanity.

The third garden is that of the Garden Tomb where they laid Jesus. It is to that garden that Mary Magdalene came *“while it was still dark”* says St. John. St. John speaks a lot in his gospel about darkness and light. Mary Magdalene sees Jesus, but does not know it is he. In the most telling mistake in history, we read *“Supposing him to be the gardener”*. What an echo of the Book of Genesis when, after the sin of Adam and Eve we read: *“They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they covered themselves because they were naked”*.

As you entered the Cathedral this morning you will have seen our Easter Garden, covered in memorial lilies, supported by olive trees, and in the centre the cross, the tree of life. When Jesus hung on the cross, at the ninth hour there was darkness over the whole earth. And each one of us can point to dark times in our lives, not least the death of someone we love. But here on the sanctuary is the opposite pole of the cross, the opposite pole of darkness. Here is the light of the Easter

Candle telling us that the light and life of God, that our faith in God, or better still God's faith in us, disperses the darkness. *"Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness"*.

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote in 1850: *"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards"*. Catholic theology speaks of the grace of the present moment. As St. Paul said in today's reading *"Since you have been brought back to true life in Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven"*. Dennis Potter put it in a different way before he died when he said *"However predictable tomorrow is, there is an element of the unpredictable, of the "you don't know". The only thing you know is the present tense, and that newness becomes so vivid that in a perverse way, in my sickness, I can celebrate life"*.

Thought for the Day on Radio Four might put it like this: *"Today is the first day of the rest of your life"*.

Psalm 118:24 puts it even better during this Easter Mass: *"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it"*.

And one day I hope the choir will sing my favourite hymn at my funeral:

Lord for tomorrow, and it's needs

I do not pray.

Keep me my God from stain of sin.

Just for today.
