

EASTER SUNDAY

When we listen to a sermon we should ask ourselves, “So what? How does this message from the Bible affect me, and how will it touch my life and the lives of those who are listening with me”?

A sermon can tell us all kinds of interesting biblical facts and retell a Bible story or parable in some very interesting ways; but if all it is doing is passing on a whole heap of information, then how can we answer the question “So what”?

There is no doubt about the message of Easter. Jesus who died and was buried on Good Friday, has risen from the dead. The message the women were told early on Easter morning is clear, “Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; He has been raised”, and then throughout the day Jesus appeared to His followers, and every doubt that the women were talking rubbish disappeared. Jesus is alive!

Now comes the “so what” question. How does this affect the things that are happening in our life right now? Jesus is alive!

So what?

There is a story about a young lad who lived in the first half of the fifth century. When he was 16 years old he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave. He managed to escape and return to his family in Scotland. A few years later he had a vision of a man calling him to go back to Ireland, and over the next forty years he was responsible for converting Ireland to Christianity. This man is St Patrick of Ireland. You might be asking yourselves, “That’s all very interesting, but so what”?

Here is a possible answer to that question. He wrote a morning prayer, part of which goes like this.

May Christ shield me today. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.

In this prayer is the answer to the question “Jesus is alive, so what”? Jesus died and rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven after forty days. Jesus is not just alive somewhere in heaven, or out there somewhere, but present with us right now, in all that excites us and all that saddens us. He is alive, risen from the dead and glorified. Since His resurrection and ascension, He is now powerfully present with us whenever and wherever we might be, and whatever might be happening in our lives.

Christ is present to guide and shield us, and save us from all evil. He is right beside us when we feel vulnerable and afraid.

He is with us when we are depressed. He is present, comforting and supporting us in sickness, old age, and at our dying moment.

He is with us in the people who care for us and love us and help us. Christ is in the heart of everyone who reaches out to us when we need His presence.

Easter tells us that Jesus is alive and His presence with us affects us profoundly; it changes the way we view the highs and lows of life; it affects the way we view sin, and sickness, and death; it transforms our thinking about how we are able to cope with the things life throws our way, because we no longer think of ourselves as standing alone against all kinds of trouble; the

living Christ is with us, before us, behind us, in us, beneath us, above us.

In his prayer, St Patrick is saying that even though there may be times in our lives when we don't feel Christ's presence, there is absolutely no time when He is not right there with us and in us.

There is nothing that can happen in a day, when Christ will not be there to help us through the day. The living Christ changes our world.

Just look at what happened to the disciples after Jesus' death.

They were confused. They were alone. They hide in fear.

They doubted their faith. They were lost and could see nothing bright in their future. They felt hopeless and sad. What hope and comfort could a dead Jesus in a grave offer them?

When Jesus appears to them three days later, we see a whole new thing happen to these people, His presence gives peace, strength, purpose, joy and hope to their lives. After His resurrection, Jesus comes to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, behind locked doors in Jerusalem, on the beach of Lake Tiberias, and near the town of Bethany; He appears to them, and they realise that Jesus is there with them all the time, Christ is above them, on their right and on their left. He changes their doubts and fear into trust and confidence as He says to them, *"I will not leave you orphaned"* and *"I am with you always"*.

It's no different for us. The same living Lord who gave His disciples strength and assurance through His presence, does the same thing for us today. When we feel lost, confused, alone and afraid, Jesus is here in us and beside us. Every day Jesus appears in our lives and offers us His peace in the middle of our fears, frustrations and insecurities, especially when things seem to be totally out of control. Even when death comes near we can

remain strong and calm, knowing that Jesus is our Shepherd who is walking with us, even if the way is dark and dangerous.

He is the Shepherd who never leaves His sheep and is always guiding and protecting and giving assurance of His love and presence.

In our baptism we share in the resurrection of Jesus, and when we receive Holy Communion, we receive the body and blood of the living Saviour, He gives us the promise and assurance that He is truly present with us every day of our life, and will make us strong in body, mind and soul, until the day we leave this life to enter eternal life.

The powerful living presence of Christ will never leave us. His love will never forget us. We will never be lost.

Hopefully, now we all have the answer to the “so what” of the Easter resurrection of Jesus. He is alive, and that makes a whole lot of difference to the challenges each day brings. Jesus is alive and so we can pray the prayer of St. Patrick, that we heard earlier, with confidence.

AMEN.