

## DARKNESS – an Easter Reflection

It is a while since the last ‘Chaplain’s post’. This is partly because Lent is a time for us all to withdraw from usual events and listen to the deeper voices within us. It is also because unscheduled events crowded into our lives. These events, particularly the loss of a dear friend, world news and the liturgies of Holy Week, reminded me of a fact of life – that darkness is as essential to life as is the light.

Seeds germinate in the dark, stems grow in darkness, babies gestate in the womb, even our 12-year-old grandson observed, as he tried to cram his feet into his school shoes, ‘I think I’ve grown overnight’. Growth continues even when we can’t see it.

Easter doesn’t begin with joyful praise and chocolate eggs. Easter begins in the darkness. Archbishop Sarah Mullally reminded us in her Easter sermon, that “Before the stone was rolled away... the work of God was unfolding in the dark... in the womb of resurrection life, unseen by the world.” “God does not wait for the sun to rise to begin saving the world: the life-giving work is at full strength in the darkness.” She reminded us of those who labour at night in hospitals and care homes to ensure that people don’t feel alone. “The vigil of care is the work of staying present in the quiet and the dark.”

The work of the resurrection is forged in the hours of deep darkness, which is why our Easter vigil begins at sunset on Holy Saturday. The ancient plainsong hymn of praise – the **Exultet** - is intoned by a lone cantor in the darkness as the Easter candle is lit and brought into church. *‘This is the night...when Jesus vanquished hell’ ... ‘This is the night...that gave us back what we had lost’ ... ‘Night truly blessed... when hatred is cast out and heaven is joined to earth...’*

Around the world families are wrestling with the darkness of conflict, hatred and fear, longing for the dawn to bring the light and hope of freedom. Perhaps you are living in your own version of the dark, perhaps your own heart is broken like Mary Magdalene in the garden before dawn. The message of Easter is clear – the risen Christ stands beside you, calling your name, holding your hand and inviting you into the resurrection life.

Author of the world’s joy,  
Bearer of the world’s pain,  
In the heart of all our distress  
Let unconquerable gladness dwell.

