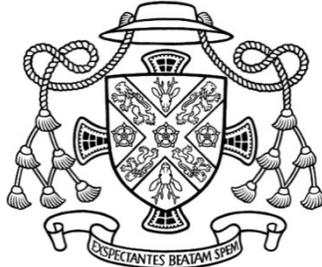


Pastoral Letter
Of
Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

12.04.2020 – Easter Sunday

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to visit the sepulchre.

Don't they say that the darkest hour is just before the dawn? When we are troubled or sick, when something weighs heavily on our minds or we feel fearful and as a result we can't sleep; doesn't the night seem so long and dark? It feels as though it is never going to end. It is even worse when we can't see a way out of our trouble or our sickness, when we can't see a solution to whatever is weighing us down or making us fearful. The darkness can feel like a physical barrier, like a proverbial brick wall!

I don't know about you, but it has felt a bit like that these last few weeks with the threat of Covid19 hanging over us all? It's dark; the night is long, and the dawn seems a long way off. That's how it must have felt for Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as they went off to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They had seen him crucified just a couple of days before, witnessed him being put in the tomb, dead, finished, ended. They were wondering how they might remove the stone from the grave.

And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. But the angel spoke; and he said to the women, "There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?"

The earthquake woke the women from their mournful morbid reverie. They had prepared the body of Jesus for burial, wrapping it in binding clothes. Now they seemed to be bound themselves by the trappings of death. But suddenly they were shaken by this mighty quake and the angel of the Lord like lightning, rolled back the stone from the tomb and destroyed the gloomy shroud of darkness that surrounded them. The women, from being plunged into the depth of dark despair were amazed, awe struck. "No need to be afraid," says the angel. "You are looking for Jesus who was crucified." Then comes the perplexing question: "Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?"

“He is not here; he has risen and now he is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Don't hang around the tomb of death; it's the tomb that's dead, finished, ended, not Jesus. He is not here he is risen. And he is going before you into Galilee, the place where you spend your everyday life. Yes, Christ accompanies us in the ordinary events of life. Or in the case of the present moment, in the very strange and disturbing events of life, radically altered by Covid19. He is with us where we live and work, struggle and love, where we will find hope and strength to survive and even thrive as we live out that resurrection life. Alleluia!

Yours in Blessed Hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Patrick". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Yours in Blessed Hope,".

Bishop of Middlesbrough

To be read out at all livestreamed masses on 12th April 2020 and available on the Diocesan website as a video message.