

Easter Day 2019

Bentworth, Shalden & Medstead

Notre Dame

This time last week it was Palm Sunday – a day of celebration.

And this time last week cathedrals and churches all over the world were waving palm branches – singing Hosanna – which means: save us.

And this time last week – all was well in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

Come the 6.30 Mass the congregation were gathered in the cathedral as the priest broke the bread – to remember the broken body of Christ – just as we did last Thursday – Maundy Thursday.

And as the bread was broken, high above them a small flame appeared – not to be confused with the flames of Pentecost – the promised Holy Spirit who Jesus said would follow him in 40 days from now.

No, this was the flame probably caused by a short circuit – something going the wrong way caused a spark.

That which took 200 years to build, and had stood for Christ for 850 years took minutes to burn.

As the night wore on, all that was left was destruction – but amazingly, the structure remained – the stones survived – the roof was gone.

But all was not lost – what remained was an empty shell – an empty tomb.

And as President Macron and others walked into the shell of the building – they stood in silence as despite the wreckage of the once beautiful cathedral – the cross remained on the High Altar.

(Image of Christ in the flames)

This so often seems to happen:

I remember the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti. Total destruction – including the cathedral – and yet, there in the midst of the rubble stood a white marble cross.

9/11 – and the collapse of the two Twin Towers – In amongst the devastation a fireman discovered an huge iron cross...which to this day stands as a symbol of God's presence in amongst the loss.

And the huge golden cross that appeared before their eyes in the burnt out Notre Dame was not a crucifix – there is no body of Christ on this cross

It is an empty cross - a resurrection cross.

Not a crucifix, but a cross.

The Bridge illustration.

Shining in the darkness – the light shines in the dark and the darkness has not overcome it.

As I mentioned on Good Friday, the West end of Notre Dame is the centre point from which everything is measured in France. For us, "how far is it to London?" is answered officially by how far it is to Nelson's Column.

"How far is it to Paris?" – is how far you are from the cathedral of Our Lady.

It is not only a medieval jewel – but the epicentre of the nation's story.

In this country, there are more churches than pubs – our places of worship remain because they are still at the heart of who we are.

And within every one of them there stands a cross. The epicentre of our faith – from which everything is measured.

Because it is the empty tomb of Christ that lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

We measure time from the birth of Christ.

But we measure our hope, the very meaning of our existence, the epicentre of our faith from the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Jesus was once taken to task by the religious leaders of his day.

In John Chapter 2 we are told that Jesus became passionately angry in the Temple.

The problem was the people leading worship were making it impossible for ordinary folk to belong. There were so many obstacles, so many barriers – a religious snobbishness had taken over what was supposed to be the place of worship for everyone.

So he turned over the tables, threw the chairs about and reordered the whole place!

And at the top of his voice he shouted: "My Father's house is to be a place of prayer – not something where people are ripped off."

The religious leaders were annoyed!

And then Jesus said: "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*"

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

It took 200 years to build Notre Dame.

And President Macron has set a target to rebuild it in five years. It will be back in 2024.

And why not?

When the original St Paul's cathedral burned to the ground in the Great Fire of London in 1666 – it is said that the first stone picked up from the rubble that remained had words engraved on it: “I will rise again”.

And that is the promise for you this Easter day – not the old stones rising again, but stones rolled to one side and you, the living stones will rise again.

Death has lost its sting because of Easter.

Death is no longer a hopeless end, but an endless hope.

The very best – is yet to be.

We are resurrection people – and Alleluia is our song.

The Lord is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!