

Living our faith in Christ

There is a Christian website which uploads reports from Mystery Worshipers who attend church services all over the world and it is interesting to read some of the categories about which comments are made: did anyone welcome you personally, was your pew comfortable, how would you describe the pre-service atmosphere, did anything distract you, which part of the service was like being in heaven, and which part was like being in the other place...and of course the sermon is marked out of 10! So if one of you is the Mystery Worshiper, or Mystery Writer...be kind!

It was an American professor in sociology, Alvin Ward Gouldner, who, in writing about wildcat strikes in a study of worker-management relationships in the 1950s, coined the phrase 'Context is everything'. And that is so important as we consider the Triduum and our celebration of the Resurrection.

I'd like to take us back to the Solemnity of the Epiphany, 6 January 2023. In fact, I'd like to take us back further. A few weeks ago I was at an event about social media for church organisations and one of the speakers was telling us what are the top social media trends for 2023, which included TikTok taking over the world, the only App that will matter in 2023 will be BeReal, and so it went on. Nobody mentioned Bic Biro's at any point!

And the speaker explained to us the term ‘Onlife’, which expresses our lived experience of the ever-increasing pervasiveness of information and communication technologies. More and more of our daily activity is ‘Onlife’ – the way we shop, work, learn, entertain ourselves, conduct our relationships. It is the interaction between offline and online.

What did we do before Apps and social media?

That’s why I’d like to begin by going a long way back to a time when calendars were not too readily available. It was necessary to make the date of Easter known in advance, since many of the liturgical celebrations of the year depend on this date. The number of weeks that follow Epiphany, the date of Ash Wednesday and the number of Sundays that follow Pentecost are all computed in relation to Easter.

A little-known rite, the popularity of which is increasing – and that is why I mentioned the Solemnity of the Epiphany, 6 January 2023 – is *The Noveritis*, the Announcement of Easter and the Moveable Feasts, for this Announcement is made after the Gospel on the Solemnity of the Epiphany.

Noveritis is the opening word of the proclamation in Latin – ‘Noveritis’, ‘We announce’.

This tradition dates back to the early days of the Church. The Patriarch of Alexandria, in whose town were the most skilled astronomers of Christianity, had the mission to send the date of the Paschal solemnity to other Eastern Patriarchs and to the Roman Pontiff, who would then inform the metropolitans of the West. Some 5th and 6th century sources testify that bishops developed the practice of publishing a pastoral letter on 6 January, an *Epistola festalis*, in which parish clergy were informed of the dates of Easter and the moveable feasts. So parish clergy received news of the date of Easter each year from their bishop and they would announce it on Epiphany. From at least the sixteenth century, however, in the Roman Rite the announcement occurred only in Epiphany masses celebrated by a bishop.

Today, the *Noveritis* formula has been re-introduced and is sung on the Solemnity of the Epiphany after the Gospel. At the Epiphany the Church marks the public inbreaking, the “epiphany”, of the Kingdom, and the *Noveritis* describes the entire year of grace as a pilgrimage to and from Easter, with Sunday understood as the re-embodiment of Easter every week.

The *Noveritis* is a reminder of the centrality of the Resurrection of the Lord in the liturgical year and the importance of the great mysteries of faith which are celebrated each year. This beautiful proclamation puts everything into perspective. Every liturgical celebration of the Church finds its authentic meaning

in the Paschal Mystery, even Christmas. The Paschal Mystery was precisely why Jesus Christ came down from heaven and became flesh. He was born in time so that he could give his flesh for the life of the world.

The season of Christmas ends with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. As the season draws to an end, the Solemnity of the Epiphany offers an opportunity to proclaim the centrality of Christ's paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life.

Here is a translation of the *Noveritis* for this year:

“Beloved brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has been manifested among us, and always will be until his return.

Within the rhythms and events of time, we remember and live out the mysteries of salvation.

The Triduum of the crucified, buried and risen Lord is the centre of the entire liturgical year, which will culminate on Easter Sunday, 9 April.

On each Sunday, the weekly Easter, holy Church makes present this great event, by which Christ conquered sin and death.

From Easter flow all holy days: Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent will be on 22 February; the Ascension of the Lord, on 18 May; Pentecost, on 28 May; and the first Sunday of Advent, on 3 December.

The pilgrim Church on earth proclaims the Easter of her Lord also on the feasts of the holy Mother of God, of the apostles and saints, and on the commemoration of all the faithful departed.

To Christ, who was, who is and who is to come, the Lord of time and history, be everlasting praise for ever and ever. Amen.”

Now on Monday 5 June, if you're not celebrating the Liturgical Memorial of Saint Boniface you will be on Monday of the Ninth Week of Ordinary Time. The very observant might recall that Ash Wednesday this year fell in the middle of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time. So we appear to have a lost week or so somewhere along the line!

Anyway, in June we will return to Ordinary Time, a liturgical season one commentator has described as a “terminological abomination”.

Now being someone who likes words, I have looked in the dictionary and found that ‘ordinary’ is an adjective referring to something “with no special or distinctive features, what is commonplace or standard”.

Ordinary Time – I wonder if we have the wrong word? Is Ordinary Time a Mundane or Run-of-the-Mill Time? If this is so there is something disjointed about a liturgical year centered on the sacred mysteries of Christ having a “time-

out” section where we forget, even for a moment, how all time and history have been forever changed by the Resurrection, especially when that “time-out” takes up 50% of the year.

There are some scholars who suggest that this is not *Ordinary* Time but Ordinal Time, because it refers to the ordinal numbering of the Sundays. This would make the season ‘Ordered Time’, or ‘Counted Time’, ‘Numbered Time’.

What we must avoid, of course, is any suggestion that we have made God ‘ordinary’. The goal of this new season is to have Sundays that are as nondistinctive as possible. Other Seasons have their proper character with a focus on a particular mystery of Christ, while the Sundays of Ordinary Time are supposed to recall the very mystery of Christ in its fullness, the ideal Christian Sunday without any further specification – a Lord’s Day in its pure state.

In the publicity for this talk I quoted the mournful ending to the Stations of the Cross written by St Alphonsus Liquori in 1787: “Consider how the disciples, accompanied by his holy Mother, carried the body of Jesus to bury it. They closed the tomb, and all came sorrowfully away”.

These words paint a disconsolate, tragic and mournful ending.

And in a sense St Alphonsus was saying nothing new. The challenge of the Triduum, of the celebration of the Resurrection, is not one that is new. Peter, James, and John experienced amazing things as disciples of Jesus. They walked beside the Lord witnessing his acts of healing, listened to his teaching, and even participated in miracles. And after the Resurrection, in *John 21:3*, what does Peter say? “I am going fishing”, and they replied, “We will come with you”.

So after the Resurrection, what did they do? They went back to what was ordinary, what was normal for them. Now we know that subsequent events changed even that, rendered the normal obsolete.

One of the great defenders of the Christian faith in the 4th century was St Athanasius. Writing to his Alexandrian congregation he reminded them that Easter, which defines the entire liturgical year, is celebrated annually because Easter “guides us through the rituals that meet us in this world”.

“In the wonder of his love, the Lord gathers to this feast those who are far apart, and brings together in unity of faith those who may be physically separated from each other”, in order to experience in the liturgy the truth that “the grace of Easter is not restricted to one occasion. Its rays of glory never set. It is always at hand to enlighten the mind of those who desire it. Its power is always there for those

whose minds have been enlightened and who meditate day and night on the holy Scriptures”.

This is precisely the point made by the *Noveritis*.

The Church’s proclamation of dates, and Athanasius’s emphasis on the centrality of Easter, are both important reminders that our faith is grounded in history, not in “narrative”. And if they are grounded in history the Triduum and Ordinary Time are linked inseparably because, as one American philosopher, Professor Peter Kreeft teaches, it is actually “His-story”. “His-story”, the events that we recall this week, changed history. The events of this week changed people’s lives for ever; changed our lives for ever.

Salvation history is the history of the world, read at its proper depth and against an appropriately ample horizon. That is why there is no such thing as “Ordinary Time”. Because history is His-story, all time is his time and there is nothing “ordinary” about that. Living that reality – living in *that* time – is the challenge of the imitation of Christ.

So how do we go from here, how do we try to ensure that our celebration of the Resurrection *does* make a difference and that there is no Ordinary Time in our lives?

Today is not just history; it is the continuing presence. The “moment” that we celebrate today must resonate throughout history, His-story.

This aspect of the Passion, the Triduum – the continuing presence of the crucified Lord in our lives – was captured well in the Way of the Cross celebrated in Toronto during World Youth Day 2002, with young people tracing the Via Dolorosa through the city centre.

This is part of the thought-provoking text:

‘Jesus moves through the heart of the city. He carries the Cross past air-conditioned skyscrapers filled with the busy and the powerful. He walks past the sick in the hospitals that line University Avenue. He shares their suffering, the young and old, male and female.

He makes his way, station after station, through the believers and the atheists, the hopeful and the despairing, the rich and the poor, the happy families and the forlorn individuals. He is the object of scrutiny by curious onlookers, excited children, contemplative crowds. He passes through a gathering of nations, languages, and cultures, sowing on his way the question that every Christian must answer: “And who do you say that I am?” He is nailed to the cross, then placed in the tomb. The crowd disperses into the night, each person looking for the last station – the station that manifests itself in life’s many twists and turns.

Tonight Jesus passes among us on the Way of the Cross – just as he does every day on the streets of the world.’

If we are open to the grace of Easter, to the new life of the Resurrection, we should have a firm desire to amend our lives. This is ensuring Jesus is present in my life every day, so that, as Athanasius said, the grace of Easter is not restricted to one occasion

I want Easter to make a difference in my heart, in the way I live. Through the grace of Easter I want to change things in my life for the better. I must have a determination to allow Easter to make a difference. This may manifest itself in setting a goal or a target to achieve, even. If you don’t know where you’re going, you can’t find the way. It’s like Satnav: it will not show you the route unless you have entered your destination.

There are two very common mistakes in this determination to do better, correct though the determination is. One is that we want to change everything (and then get frustrated when the world hasn’t changed) and the other is the vagueness of our goal: “I want to be a better person”. We can’t change everything at once, so why not decide on one thing, maybe even the one that you most dislike about yourself. And make sure it’s realistic. To say “I will be a better person” is a bit

vague; to say “I will spend an hour a day in mission, helping others” is about allowing the grace of Easter to work in you.

The American author John Calvin Maxwell came up with the pithy statement: “Dreams don’t work unless you do”.

But I don’t want to leave us there.

I’ll end with the words of Pope Francis from last Wednesday’s General Audience (5 April), which seem very appropriate as we celebrate the Triduum and look to the future:

“[On Palm] Sunday, the Liturgy had us listen to the Passion of the Lord. It ended with these words: “They sealed the stone” (cf. *Mt 27:66*). Everything seemed over. For the disciples, that boulder signified *the final end of their hope*. The Teacher was crucified, killed in the cruellest and most humiliating manner, hung upon the infamous gallows outside the city – a public failure, the worst possible ending, it was the worst at that time. Now for us today, there is nothing entirely strange regarding the discouragement that oppressed the disciples. Gloomy thoughts and feelings of frustration accumulate in us as well. Why is there so much indifference toward God? This is interesting: Why is there so much evil in the world? Well, look, there is evil in the world! Why do inequalities continue to

increase and why is that long-awaited peace not arriving? Why are we so attached to war, to treating each other badly? In each person's heart, how many expectations have faded; how many delusions there are! And again, there is that feeling that times gone by were better and that in the world, perhaps even in the Church, things are not going the way they once did.... In short, even today, hope sometimes seems to be sealed behind the stone of mistrust. And I invite each one of you to think: Where is your hope? Is your hope alive, or have you sealed it up there, or have you put it there in a drawer, like a memory? Does your hope push you to walk or is it a romantic memory, as if it is something that doesn't exist. Where is your hope today?"

Thank you and may you have a blessed Easter.

Liam Kelly
Easter Triduum 2023

DE PUBLICATIONE FESTORUM MOBILIIUM

III
N ové- ri- tis, fratres ca- ríssimi, quod annu- énte
Know, dear brethren, that by leave of

De- i mi- se- ri- córdi- a, si- cut de Na- ti- vi- tá- te Dómi- ni
God's mercy as we have rejoiced at the birth of our Lord

nostri Ie- su Christi ga- ví- si sumus, i- ta et de Re- surrecti- óne e- iúsdem Salva- tó- ris
Jesus Christ, so we also announce to you the joy of his resurrection,

nostri gáudi- um vobis annunti- á- mus. Di- e vi- gé- sima secúnda Febru- á- ri- i di- es Cí- ne-
who is our Saviour. On the twenty-second day of February is Ash Wednesday,

rum, et i- ní- ti- um ie- iúni- i sacra- tíssimæ Quadragé- simæ. Di- e nona Aprí- lis sanctum
and the beginning of the fast of the most sacred Lenten season. On the ninth day of April

Pascha Dómi- ni nostri Ie- su Christi cum gáudi- o ce- lebrá- bimus. Di- e octá- va dé- cima
we will celebrate with joy Easter Day, the holy Pasch of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the eighteenth day

Ma- ii e- rit Ascénsi- o Dómi- ni nostri Ie- su Chri- sti. Vi- gé- sima octá- va e- iúsdem
of May will be the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the Twenty-eighth day of the same

Festum Penteco- stes. Di- e octá- va Iúni- i Festum sacra- tíssimi Córpo- ris Chri- sti.
month the feast of Pentecost. On the Eleventh day of June, the feast of Corpus Christi.

Di- e térti- a De- cémbris Domí- ni- ca prima Advéntus Dómi- ni nostri Ie- su Christi,
On the Third day of December the First Sunday of Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ,

cu- i est honor et gló- ri- a, in sæcu- la sæcu- lórum. Amen.
to whom is honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.