

Homily for 5th Sunday of Easter

By Dom David Tomlins

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The following story or parable was told by Shimon Peres who has been Israeli Prime Minister and shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994.

A Rabbi gathered together his students and asked them:

'How do you know the exact moment when night ends and day begins?'

'When it's light enough to tell a sheep from a dog,' said one boy.

Another student said: 'No, when it's light enough to tell an olive tree from a fig tree.'

'No, that's not a good definition either.'

'Well, what's the right answer?' asked the boys.

And the Rabbi said:

'When a stranger approaches, and we think he is our brother, and all conflicts disappear, that is the moment when night ends and day begins.'

(Paulo Coelho: *Like The Flowing River: Thoughts and Reflections*, p.82: "The Moment of Dawn")

Each morning the Church has us sing those words of Zachary at the birth of his son, John the Baptist, about "the loving-kindness of the heart of our God who visits us like the dawn from on high". He went on to sing of the promise that "God will give light to those in darkness, those who dwell in the shadow of death and guide us into the way of peace" (Lk.1:78-79).

In this Easter season we are celebrating our faith in **the coming of the True Dawn into human life**. Jesus, by his resurrection, has overcome sin and death. As we followed the Paschal Candle at the Easter Vigil we sang:

Christ is the light of the world,
and those who follow him
walk not in darkness
but have the light of life.

Each of us, in baptism, has been brought out of the darkness of sin and death into the light of Christ. In the baptismal ceremony a candle is lit from the Easter candle and the celebrant says:

You have been enlightened by Christ.
Walk always as children of the light
and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts.
When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him
with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

(*Christian Initiation of Adults*)

How does the world know that the night has ended and the true day has begun? I would suggest that Shimon Peres gave us the answer:

When a stranger approaches, and when we think he is our brother, and all conflicts disappear, that is when the night ends and day begins.

If we have become baptismal sharers in Christ and his Resurrection, **our mission** is to be **"the light of the world"** (Mt.5:14-16), **to show all**, of whatever faith or lack of it, that **we recognise everyone as our brother, our sister.** The light of Christ, the Light who is Christ, is the source of this recognition. Jesus teaches us this in this morning's gospel (John 13:31-35):

My little children,
I shall not be with you much longer.
I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.
By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples.

God's loving-kindness, Jesus, his love, has been incarnated in our world. He recognised all as his brothers and sisters. The night has ended, day has dawned. But everyone will know this is true *only if* we **"love one another as (he) has loved us"**. If, when the other approaches, we do not think he or she is our brother or sister, if we do not put an end to conflict with those we meet, we give a counter-witness to the good news that "the night is over" (cf. Rev.21:25). On the contrary, if we "love one another as (Jesus) has loved us", we become **evidence to one another** that sin and death have been overcome, that the night is over, in the light of the new day of Christ there are no more strangers or enemies.

St. Francis of Assisi, in his well-known "Peace Prayer", places on our lips an appeal for this grace to welcome each other as brothers and sisters despite all the temptations to continue in the ways of darkness, sin and death. To pray his prayer is to commit ourselves to **passing over** from darkness to light, to struggle in faith to become truly **Easter People**. Listen to this life-giving dynamic in every line of his prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to
console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

To live according to this pattern is to be authentically an Easter People, men and women who reveal in our relationships with one another our dying and our rising with Jesus; it is to love one another as Jesus has loved us, renouncing all bitterness and refusal to forgive; it is to be light to the world so that we recognise one another as brothers and sisters in the light of the resurrection, and help others, by ourselves being instruments of peace and love, to find the same grace in their lives.

"How do we know the exact moment when night ends and day begins?... When a stranger (anyone) approaches, and we think he is our brother, and all conflicts disappear, that is the moment when night ends and day begins".

Let us pray in the closing words of the Easter Proclamation:

May the Morning Star, which never sets,
find this flame still burning;
Christ, that Morning Star,
who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son, who lives and reigns,
for ever and ever.