

Homily for Easter Vigil 11 April 2020, given at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford by Bishop Alan Williams sm

“I want to wish you wherever you are a very happy and blessed Easter.

I offer this Mass for the intentions of the parishioners of Wickford, who have allowed their church to be a pro-cathedral for Brentwood; for the intentions of the people and priests of Brentwood Diocese; and for all those watching through livestreaming - tonight your intentions will become my intentions.

Tonight is the feast of feasts, the greatest feast of the Christian calendar. St Athanasius and all the saints assure us that nothing can match this feast in its solemnity, in its grandeur and its implications for each one of us.

As St Paul said in the epistle today, in Christ we die, in Christ we are raised and in this Easter Vigil we celebrate that fundamental fact of our salvation and our redemption.

This year is the year of the Covid-19 virus. So many people in so many ways have been affected by the illness. The suffering and anxiety of so many continues. For myself, this Holy Week, I am thinking not so much of the great events, the grand celebrations of this weekend but also how the grace of God works through the smallest of people, the slightest of events. In particular, God in Christ used a woman of faith and hope as his apostle of the empty tomb. We are talking, of course, of Mary Magdalene. In the gospels we are assured that she had a chequered and difficult history but she met her friend, her saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ and, for her, she died to her sinfulness and rose to new life. And somehow on that Easter morning, Mary Magdalene had that hope, that flicker of faith to return to the tomb. Something still could be done, something still could be hoped for. Well, what she found exceeded all her hopes, all our hopes – she found that Jesus Christ, the crucified Lord, was risen, risen from the dead. Not just that, his rising from the dead guarantees our rising from the dead also. In other words, for Mary Magdalene, for all Christian disciples, love, hope are the last words, not despair and death.

So however you are affected by the current crisis, I do urge you with the help of God in Christ to look beyond the present and hope in the future. Mary was so convinced of what she found and the words Jesus spoke to her that she became the first witness of the resurrection, the great apostle of the resurrection - in the words of St Thomas Aquinas, “de apostolorum apostola” (Apostle of the apostles). Let’s make Mary’s witness, our witness. Let us believe with all our heart that from passion and suffering by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we will move to resurrection to eternal life, to eternal happiness.

Once again, wherever you are, I wish you a very happy and blessed Easter for yourselves, your families and all those you care about in this world.”

Bishop Alan Williams sm