

St Luke's in the City

2nd Sunday in Lent

4 March 2007

Celebrating at the CROSSroads

Dear Friends,

Lent and Easter concentrate our attention on the church's symbols. Lent is a deliberate stripping back to the barest essential symbols. Easter explodes with the full richness of the symbols of Christian proclamation – darkness, light, wood, nails, silence, water, oil, bread, wine. Nowhere is this full complement of Christian symbol more intense, more dramatic and more expansive than in the Easter Triduum. It's richness is unsurpassed. It's symbolic potency unrivalled.

The word 'symbol' comes from the Greek. It means something which is so broken that when the two separated halves are put together again those who have them in their possession, as well as independent observers, can recognise them as belonging together. In antiquity two halves of a broken token when fitted together guaranteed a third party's identity. The Greek is the composite συν-βαλλειν sun-ballein. It means 'to throw together'. A 'symbol' makes one that which was previously divided. A symbol is about identity and unity, about revealing that which was previously unrecognisable and about unifying that which was previously separated.

All liturgy serves symbolic purpose. Every writing in Holy Scripture is about symbolic truth. Every Eucharist embodies symbolic reality. That which was previously unrecognisable and divided is thrown together, its true identity revealed, united. The Easter Triduum is the source of all liturgy, as the sacred container in which previously unrecognised Scripture and Sacrament are united, their true identities revealed. We are thrown together, literally, as strangers to each other, searchers and seekers, companions on the way of Christ who as yet do not recognise each other fully - thrown together in the deep darkness of crucifixion and exposed to dazzling resurrection light. The Easter Triduum literally throws us together over a three-day period, making one Body that which was previously discreet me and you, revealing our true identity in Christ and to each other, unifying that which seems to us to be impossibly separated. Symbol has the power to reveal this in a way that mere words can never achieve. The Easter Triduum is the vessel which makes for the circumstances for this see-ing.

We may often feel that our lives are impossibly separated – from ourselves, from others, from God. Our true identity remains unknown. We hardly recognise the truth about ourselves, let alone anyone else. Our world feels hopelessly divided. The unitive vision which our hearts long for is bitterly divided by our behaviour and the behaviour of others. The Easter Triduum is the church's great sun-Ballein, its throwing together of the previously separated, revealing our true identity and embodying the unity at the heart of God. The Triduum is a gift for us. More importantly, it is for those who have not yet experienced its symbolic truth. Is there someone you could invite to experience the Triduum this year?

With my love, David