**Holy Week The Great Vigil of Easter 2020 - Reflection**

*History happens to others. It is about events that happened somewhere else, sometime else. Memory is my story. Memory is identity*.”

(Jonathan Sacks, The Times 22 Oct 2007).

Memory remembers the past and is what gathers scattered individual members into one body and community. Community is sustained by common memory.

Since the beginning of time, we have gathered to tell our communal stories of who we are and how we have got here. Until recently, all gatherings took place around fires that provide warmth, light and protection. Imagine yourself around such a fire 2,000 years ago.

You know the one true God through the Genesis story of creation; through the Exodus story of liberation from slavery; and you believe the promise through the Prophets, such as Isaiah and Ezekiel, of God’s rescue mission, a coming Messiah and new Kingdom of peace.

Through four centuries of silence from God, you and your ancestors have been sustained by these great themes which are as familiar and close to you as your heartbeat. They are so central to your communal identity that Jesus causes a stir precisely because everything he says and does resonates with, or re-enacts, these familiar stories from Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah & Ezekiel.

When Jesus is rejected and crucified you are crushed, but his resurrection appearances continue to echo these great themes. These new resurrection stories are then repeated around fires and gatherings in your community. It is a physically scattered community, across many different territories. Within a few years, the Apostle Paul is writing to you, telling of Jesus’ fulfilment of God’s promise through his life, death and resurrection and its significance in your communal memory and history.

Then the 4 Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke & John are written down while there are still people alive who witnessed Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection.

For you, it may be second nature to worship the one true God known through Genesis and creation; Exodus and liberation; and the new Kingdom of peace promised by the Prophets. While for the Gentile believers in Jesus, they do not share your common memory and need instruction and teaching. Particularly before they can participate in the meal of love that becomes the thanksgiving or Eucharist we know today.

There are two years of teaching and instruction before the student is ready, and fully understands the significance of Baptism and of the meal they will then participate in. During their teaching they are not allowed to witness the taking, breaking and sharing of the bread and wine that Jesus commanded be done in remembrance of him.

The student witnesses this love meal of thanksgiving and remembrance for the first time once they know the communal story; understand the significance of Baptism and the mystery they are taking part in. That significance is reinforced by first participating in the love meal at the earliest major Christian worship service we know of – the great Paschal or Easter Vigil.

A Vigil lasting all night, during which the communal story of God’s saving work - from creation through the exodus to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ - is retold around a fire until the first rays of dawn; when the rising sun in the sky symbolises the rising of the Son of God, who is the light that dispels all darkness.

Only then does the celebration of Mass begin and the students participate in the love meal for the very first time. And so it also came to be that, early on in the church’s history, Lent emerged as the season of discipline coupled to Easter, as a way of everyone journeying with Jesus toward his death and resurrection - as well as journeying with these students in advance of their baptism at this great feast of risen life.

Our challenge, as it is for every generation, is to ask ourselves do we have everything and everyone we need to journey with Jesus toward his death and resurrection? In baptism we die with Christ to the old and are raised with him to the new, and every Lent season we travel back to this place of our rebirth. May we always travel back on each Lenten journey with awe and rejoicing; remembering, repenting and renewing vows.

*Remembering* our communal story through the Great Vigil service scriptures; *repenting* of the ways we have separated ourselves from Jesus on our journey; and *renewing* our baptism vows – after gathering around a fire and hearing once again of God’s great salvation love story. The common memory that gathers us – currently a scattered community - into one body.