

Easter Sunday 2019: St Thomas on The Bourne.

'Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"...'

At the eastern, up-stream end of the Ile de la Cité in Paris is a small and seemingly insignificant memorial. If you keep your back to what is now the blackened shell of Notre Dame and walk eastwards you will find it. It seems initially as though it consists of just a couple of curved walls. Walk closer and you will find that a path takes you past the walls and leads you down underground into a kind of crypt. There in the darkness you are faced with a barred gate. But beyond the gate is a narrow tunnel on the walls of which hang thousands of crystal discs, in shape and size very like the wafer breads we receive at Communion. Each crystal is lit. Each crystal represents a Jew who was deported from this point on the island in the Seine and was taken with his fellow Jews to the extermination camps of Germany in the Second World War. There are about 200,000 crystal discs...it's a stark and sobering place; a reminder of our human capacity for evil.

The reaction this past week to the horrors of the fire in Notre Dame has been heartfelt. It is a church which represents not only the glories of Gothic architecture, but holds within its walls the memories of so many. And at the very heart of the heart of that building is the Mass. Even in a country as secular as France now is, the Mass continues to be celebrated. It's a sign of hope in the midst of a troubled and turbulent world. It's no wonder that the photographic image which flew around the world in milliseconds after the fire is a golden cross amongst the charred darkness of devastation.

So, on one small island in Paris... there is a memorial of the evils of Jewish suffering and the goodness, hope and love represented by that golden Cross.

Hold those two images together in your heart and mind and soul this Easter Day...for both images are deeply, deeply true...They represent the way in which God plunges into the darkness of evil to be in solidarity with us, whatever our suffering, and out of that evil brings to us the overwhelming beauty of the Resurrection...the Resurrection of Jesus Christ which does conquer all evil and always, always, always brings light out of darkness.

That is our Easter hope and the bedrock of our faith, which is why we simply whisper to God from the depths of our souls: 'Alleluia'.

The Rt Revd Dr Christopher Herbert