

April 2018

The Rector writes:

‘RESURRECTION’



When St Martin returned to the house of Bishop Hilary in Poitiers in 361AD, he was determined to continue the life of a hermit, yet wanted to be open to the possibility that others might wish to join him in living a life of simplicity and that together they might establish a religious community. It so happened that Hilary had a country retreat in a steep little valley some 13 miles from his home, this had been demolished in an invasion of the Alemanni in 276AD and never rebuilt. It was here that Martin settled and developed his community, calling it Liguge (the place of the little cells or hut circles).

Martin was soon joined by others, and a community grew up where each brother lived in his own hut or cave, where he prayed, studied and made mats. The whole group came together for Sunday worship, and Martin was available for consultation. One such brother, after only a few days in the community became seriously ill with a violent fever. Martin was sought for help, but was away for a three days. On his return Martin found the new catechumen dead, and worse still that he had died unbaptised! Martin stretched himself on the man and invoking the Holy Spirit prayed that he might not suffer the fate of the unbaptised (at that time it was thought the unbaptised were bound for hell!). Two hours later the man opened his eyes and began singing thanks to the Lord, and was baptised by Martin. The community were amazed, and then dumbfounded when the man gave an account of what had happened to him. According to Martin's biographer Sulpitius Severus, the man gave the following explanation, 'I stood before the judgement throne and was given a severe sentence, then two angels approached the throne and told the Judge of Martin's prayer, and the Judge ordered that I be returned to Martin for baptism'. This strange event caused more and more men to come to Martin, reckoning him as another Elisha, given power by God to raise the dead. (2 Kings 4:32ff). Martin, normally quiet and passive was so moved by what had happened that he too burst into spontaneous bouts of praise.

A few years later, walking home from Poitiers, Martin was passing the large villa of a wealthy neighbour when he heard cries of distress. He joined a crowd gathered round a hut where a slave had been discovered hanging from a beam. Martin dispersed the crowd, and again prayed fervently and with authority. To his delight the slave revived, and the crowd were amazed when Martin led him back to the villa.

These two seemingly miraculous healings in an age when scientific diagnosis was out of the question were enough to put Martin's sanctity beyond doubt – and his name began to be spread abroad as a healer. Martin still sought the quiet life, claiming all was done not by him but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Incredible stories! Yes! But this is Easter when the Power of God is demonstrated in the incredible Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter is the most astonishing day in the history of the world. We have travelled from a stable in Bethlehem where we celebrated the birth of God's son, travelled through Galilee to Jerusalem with Jesus showing us how to live, experienced the pain and anguish of Holy Week and Good Friday, arriving at Holy Saturday feeling spiritually exhausted, and now it is EASTER. Christ is risen, we cry, Alleluia! God erupts into his creation and blows it apart, 'shattering our closed minds and throwing open the windows of eternity', as Bishop John Pritchard puts his book 'Living Easter through the Year'. Do we really live as an Easter people? Do we believe still in the amazing power of miracles? Does Resurrection joy still flood our lives with hope in our modern world, and in our life as a church? Perhaps we need to shout louder and longer the Easter acclamation:

ALLELUIA, CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED ALLELUIA!

Wishing you Easter Joy,
Yours in Christ,
Reverend John, your Rector