



St Marylebone
Parish Church

2nd Before Lent 2019
11.00am Choral Eucharist

My mother always said that I'm not a 'good looker'. It is one of her favourite lines. Whenever any of us had lost our keys, or PE shoes or whatever she would employ that witchcraft known seemingly only to mothers: the ability to know where everything is and find it in an instant; and then she would say 'you never were a good looker'. And we would groan at the pun. It is by no means the worst of her puns – be thankful that I'm sparing you those.

But, whether you are a 'good looker' or not, today you really can't miss it. It's all right in front of our eyes: up in our apse.

There they are: The Lord enthroned, the angels, twenty four elders and the four living creatures from the first reading from The Revelation to St John the Divine.

These four beasts nestled up around the throne of Christ our King, and named down here on the frieze too are the 4

Evangelists, of course: St Luke the ox, St John himself the eagle, the lion St Mark and the angel, St Matthew.

Sunday by Sunday our apse holds before our eyes the answer to the Apostles question after the storm ‘who is this?’ (Luke 8.25)

Who it is that we believe in. Christianity isn’t a set of principles or cultural understandings or moral codes; it is a relationship. Ultimately being a Christian is a matter of ‘doing life with Jesus’. Keeping our eyes fixed on Him from whom we came and to whom we are returning pilgrims; and out of that fundamental relationship the rest of our lives to unfold.

That’s why I love this apse. It says it all.

The Four beasts.

The Name of Jesus. IHS – being Jesus, the Latinate Iesus, with the vowels omitted.

The Crucifixion.

Our apse rightly calibrates our lives by putting the central events of history – the paschal mystery of Christ’s life, death, Resurrection and Ascension – at the centre of *our* daily and weekly lives.

And the paschal mystery isn’t just remembered like a nice old family story, but our apse reminds us, these realities are made present in our midst, they surge through the very fabric of our ‘**now**’. Around the lower part of the freeze

those words of Our Lord recorded by St John again, this time in His Gospel in chapter 6:

‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven, he that cometh to me shall never hunger’.

And from S. Matthew too. Have you ever noticed the words, carved in stone and painted with Gold beneath the crucifixion, directly above the altar, behind the free standing silver cross?

‘Touto Estin To Soma Mou’

‘This is my Body’ (St Matthew 26.26) – which? His Body on the Cross, or His Body hidden in Bread and given to us Holy Communion? Both, one and the same – that’s why the writing is there. It’s all there in our apse.

It’s all there:

Who God is,
what He has done,
the promise He has sealed,
how we live that relationship now,
and where we are headed.

And where is it that we in this world of horror and banality and loveliness are headed? Christ upon his throne and the joyful throngs. We see them, as our own Charles Wesley wrote ‘Cas[ting their] crowns before Him, lost in wonder, love and praise’. St John records their eternal song of ecstasy: ‘Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus’ (Revelation 4.8). A little early we’ll join our own voices with theirs at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer.

This is the relationship that defines who we are, what we are about and where we are headed. And not just us, but because of the cosmic scale of Christ's Kingship – all things.

For several Sundays now the light streaming through the apse windows has blinded some people as they come up for Holy Communion, especially on this pulpit side. It has struck me how absolutely appropriate this is. What we approach in these Holy Mysteries is as *blinding* as it is *revealing*. The realities St John tries to describe with words, that our apse tries to depict, are by their nature beyond our human ability to perceive and know. Christ's passion and Resurrection, our purpose and destiny, God's love blinds and overwhelms us, our humble senses are simply not up to the task of *feeling* or *knowing* this stuff. It's like playing Beethoven on a tin whistle.

And yet, in a way that words can't match we know that this is so. All these things; because **He is**.

'*Who* then is this that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey Him?'. (Luke 8.25)

And 'I beheld...every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'
(Revelation 5.13)