

Easter Vigil Reflection

Give us courage to accompany others, for in walking at their side, we find you there present with us.

This Saturday of Holy Week often feels strange, with the drama and emotion of the Lord's Passion we experienced yesterday giving way to the silence of the tomb. This silence and stillness is the starting point of the famous ancient homily which is found in the Office of Readings for today. As the earth lies still, it paints a beautiful picture of Jesus descending to the dead and bringing them from the darkness into the light of the risen life.

We too step into this light during the Easter Vigil, the Church goes from darkness to the light provided by the candles and finally being fully lit as we finally get to profess the Gloria after the weeks of Lent. As with each of the services of this year's Triduum, we won't be physically present to share in this beautiful moment. But the symbolism of it may speak to our hearts in a new way: perhaps this year we can sense afresh that anticipation and longing for the first glimpse of the Light of the World that will conquer the darkness around the earth.

Our readings today, if done in full, are a mammoth undertaking. Through the course of nine readings and seven psalms and canticles, we listen to a succession of stories and prophecies which provide a background and explanation of Christ's paschal mystery. Very movingly, they highlight the intimate link between God and his people, a relationship which goes through the highs and lows of the lives of individuals like Moses and Abraham, as well as the people of Israel as a whole. This is summed up beautifully in the Fourth Reading taken from Isaiah's prophecy: *'for the mountains may depart, the hills may be shaken, but my love for you will never leave you and my covenant of peace with you shall never be shaken.'*

JRS' mission to accompany refugees is focused on building relationships with our refugee friends. The constancy we hear in Isaiah is our model, though we know we sometimes fall short of this. True accompaniment is hard, especially when the one you are accompanying is facing uncertainty and great pain. But our desire to walk alongside one another seems to be enough for God to work through us and enable strong relationships to grow.

The relationships are as individual as the many people who make up the JRS community. Some of the longstanding relationships are between refugees themselves who come to know one another and support each other as they attend the day centre over many years. Some are between refugees and staff and volunteers. We have volunteers on our team who have been part of refugees' lives for more than a decade. It is these relationships that explain most clearly why we refer to refugees who we accompany as 'our friends', and they too accompany us through the times when we need it. The welcome and sense of community that can come from a commitment to accompany is one of the most powerful antidotes to the hostility and isolation our refugee friends feel in their day to day lives.

Our charter states 'To accompany refugees is to affirm that God is present in human history, even in most tragic episodes'; it is through our bonds with one another, whether we are a refugee friend, staff member or volunteer, that we can feel God's presence amongst us.

As we move to celebrate the rising of Christ, and join the choruses of "Hallelujah, He is risen. He is risen indeed!", we invite you to reflect on the ways you can accompany those who might need it at this difficult time. Can you sense the risen Lord's presence here?