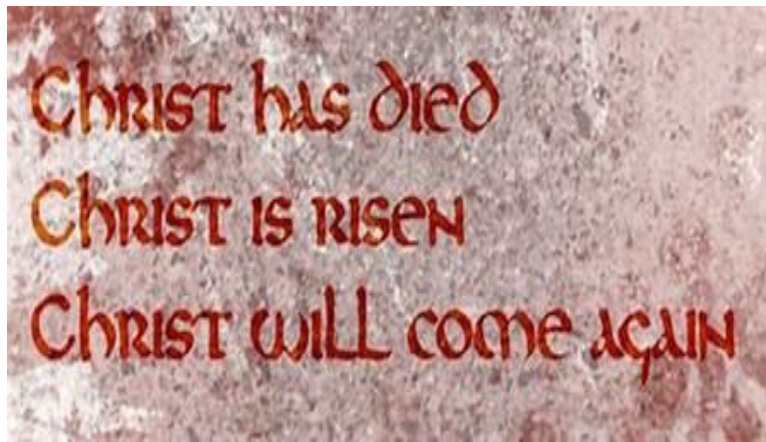


As you may have noticed over the years that I have been here at St. Martin's, I like to tell stories of the past about people, places and events that were important to me. Memory is a great gift from God and I think, as we get older, we fear any diminishment of our memories. My father, in later years, slowly began to be affected by loss of memory: I am never sure if this is dementia, Alzheimer's, or hardening of the arteries. I first clearly noticed it when I arrived home to Brooklyn after several months of my ministry teaching in our seminary at the time which was in Western Pennsylvania. When he saw me, he was delighted and welcomed me. He then asked me if I had come by horse from Killanena. Killanena was the name of the village where he grew up in Ireland. Although pained at what I saw happening to him, I said *no Dad, I came by car by Erie*. Unlike most Irishman, my father was never one to sing in a pub or at a party. Elena, our music director, has frequently asked me to follow that tradition of Dad. However, once at supper, he suddenly broke into this verse: *Up with the kettle and down with the pan, and give us a penny to bury the wren*. In parts of rural Ireland, many years ago, on the day after Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, the local boys would go from house to house, in a way similar to our Halloween, asking for money, either for themselves or for a good cause. I am not sure if they played tricks or not on those they visited. The wren was a bird that that Irish believed had betrayed them in the middle-ages by revealing them in a battle with the Norsemen. The bird was also blamed for betraying the first Christian martyr St. Stephen. I was fascinated to hear my Dad sing a childhood nursery rhyme in his mid-seventies. In his own mind, for a moment, he was a *Wren Boy*. Memory and how it works in us amazes me.

I can sit and think of great memories of Dad: my first trip with him to the Polo Grounds to see the 1962 Mets. I can walk in Grand Central Station, where he worked for more than 40 years, and feel his presence, or visualize him lying in the sun at Coney Island. I find such remembering bittersweet. When we remember, we enjoy the gift of the other person for a moment, but then realize that the moment has passed and I miss the person. It also reminds us that we are getting older, and no longer a child or a young priest home on vacation.



These thoughts came to me as I prayed about the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. For thirty-three years Jesus walked the earth. He ate and drank, and breathed the same air as me. He sailed on the Sea of Galilee and walked the dusty streets of

Nazareth. He offered his life in a profound love for you and me on Good Friday. Then, the most powerful memory of all, he broke forth from the chains of death on the first Easter, with the promise of eternal life for all who believe in Him. For forty days, he continued to walk the earth and was with the early church. Sometimes, his resurrected body confused the apostles and they thought he was a ghost, and other times he could cook fish for them on the shores of Galilee. That is the memory of him. And then, with the great promise of not leaving us orphans, that he would always be with us, and assuring us of the coming forth of the Holy Spirit, he ascended to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would also be present to us.

This is a bittersweet moment for the apostles: they are sad to see him depart, but they are vibrantly alive with his message to make him alive in their preaching by the grace of the Holy Spirit. How Blessed we are our believers; we have the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist; we enter into his death and resurrection at every Mass the word of God in the Sacred Scriptures speaks to us. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus alive in the wonder of creation, in the gift of life, of love, of family and friend, in the kind acts we can do for others and in the kind act done for us. Jesus is so very present to us. Still, this feast also speaks to us that we now have the task by the Spirit to make him present and visible in our world by how we live and act. We are also the real presence of God on earth when we are faithful to the Christian life. The mission of Jesus given to him by his Father is to continue through. The Church and our faith is not a mere memory of the Living God, it is our mission to continue to touch the broken world we live in with his

love. I often quote to you and to myself the prayer that is the Central Avenue entrance on our church:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks out his compassion to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.*