

Jenny Parnell - 11th April 2021

On the 15th of April 2019, a huge fire took hold at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. At first it seemed that the whole cathedral may fall as four hundred and fifty firefighters struggled to get the blaze under control. The next day, although the sky was thick with smoke and the air still full of ash, Notre Dame still stood. Two thirds of its impressive wooden roof and spire are gone but the stone nave and front towers were saved. According to officials, if it had taken just an extra 15 to 30 minutes to put out the fire, it would have been too late—Notre-Dame would have collapsed.

Thousands of people gathered in the streets surrounding the cathedral to pray, sing and simply to keep watch. Young people were especially moved by the plight of a building that means so much to Parisians and people from across the world, both religious and not. The day after the fire one and a half thousand young people met for a vigil organised by catholic youth groups. As they prayed, sang, and read poetry their anxiety became transformed into hope. One student was quoted as saying “Every generation has its share of reconstruction to do.”

You may have seen a photo taken of Notre-Dame’s altar after the blaze. The picture is of the blackened nave of the cathedral, a huge hole in the ceiling, rubble in front of the altar but up above an illuminated cross, somehow unscathed. This image particularly grabbed the imagination of Christians both young and old across the globe. It’s an image that is timely and relevant to Holy week as we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection and the hope of new creation.

The student standing in vigil at the charred remains of Notre Dame was right to say that each generation has its share of reconstruction to do Notre Dame needs more than reconstruction, it needs resurrection. Reconstruction implies a repetition or replication of what was before, but resurrection always brings something different, something new.

Why am I telling you about Notre Dame? Well, the Sunday after Easter is known as Low Sunday or Quasimodo Sunday amongst other names. The name ‘Low’ possibly because of the contrast to Easter Sunday and the name Quasimodo is drawn from the first words of the Latin entrance antiphon of the day. An Antiphon is the chant that the Priest sings as he approaches the altar. The Quasimodo chant is based upon 1 Peter 2 2-5 “*Like new-born infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Quasimodo was also the hero of a novel by Victor Hugo. The story tells of an orphan left at Notre Dame Cathedral on Quasimodo Sunday, hence his name. The character Quasimodo will always represent for me the ugly and the deformed being rejected and yet demonstrating great love for others.

Last week we were celebrating Easter. Jesus rejected and killed is now alive. When Jesus rose from the dead, he was not the same as when he died. Physically he did all the things he did when he was alive, in the Book of Acts we’re told that he even ate with his friends, John tells us that Mary held onto him, and we know that Thomas touched the wounds in his hands. Jesus’s resurrected form is imperishable. He has died and risen, and he will not die again. The women at the tomb were not expecting this, any talk of resurrection in Jewish thought was of the resurrection on the last day of all people at once, not of one individual. It was only later that Paul expressed in his first letter to the

Corinthians the idea that Jesus was a kind of forerunner for the rest of creation. Paul wrote “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*”

On the first Easter day, when the woman arrived at the tomb, they found it empty, an angel asked them “why do you look for the living among the dead?” When I hear the angel’s words, I cannot help but hear Isaiah alongside them “*behold, I am doing a new thing*”.

As we gradually move out of lockdown and we begin going back to worshipping together in our Church buildings, we have a lot of rebuilding and reconstruction to do. I pray that we like living stones, let ourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Resurrect our hearts Lord. Come Lord, come and do a new thing in us.

Every blessing, Jenny