Easter Sunday 2024.

Hope is in short supply nowadays in our country and indeed in our world. As the invasion of Ukraine moves through its third year, there is little or no sign of an end to war. As Gaza continues to horrify us seven months later, there is no real sign of an end to the war nor indeed the reconstruction of everything that has been destroyed. And the examples of the challenges to hope that we all have in our own country are many and varied;  mental health issues, especially in young people, self-harm caused by burdens which undermine hope; economic circumstances which prevent people from owning their own home and the list goes on and on. Our time has a great need of hope, therefore.

But what is hope? Easter Sunday morning is for us Christians the solid rock on which the hope that we have is based. It is not a product of our human efforts, plans or skills. It is not something we can create ourselves. Hope is born of an awareness of Christ in faith, the Risen Christ who overcame death on a Cross on Easter Sunday morning. Christian hope comes from God himself, from our knowledge of his love for us. There’s a big difference between Christian hope and optimism. Christian hope is the certainty, rooted in faith, that God never abandons us and remains faithful to his promise, even when we are facing what we consider to be the worst. The words of the Psalmist assure us of this;  ‘Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are there with me’.” Optimism comes from within ourselves . Hope comes from our awareness of God’s presence to us in faith.

We live in an Ireland that, for many people, has lost it everyday sense of the nearness of God to each one of us personally. Over the past twenty or thirty years in particular many people have lost the anchor of faith which gave us a sense of the nearness of God and his willing support. And having lost this have drifted into a sea of uncertainty, without an anchor, and as a result without a deep sense of hope.

For many, Easter Sunday is simply lamb, Easter eggs and the Easter bunny. And it stops there. For us who believe in the Resurrection of the Lord and his promise, not only of eternal life but of everyday support with the difficulties of life,  Easter Sunday is quite simply the day of hope and joy. On this day I cannot but think of a young woman, now in her twenties, who grew up in this community. She has discovered a deep faith in God and is full of a hope which I can only call infectious. She reminds me very much of what Pope Francis said recently about hope. ‘Nurture the spark that has been kindled in you and at the same time share it. You will come to realize that it grows by being given away’.

By tonight many of us won’t want to see another Easter egg until next year. If we could grasp the true meaning of Easter in the hope that it gives to everyone, then, like the Pope, we’d want to share it. And if we shared it, what a difference it would make to the world in which we live.