

Sunday, April 21st, 2019, Sunday of Resurrection

Readings: Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, John 20:1-18

Resurrection!

Introduction

Resurrection is the greatest of Christian ideas. Resurrection is the greatest of Christian doctrines. But if we were to affirm, to 'tick the box' of resurrection simply because it is a doctrine of Christian faith – a long standing doctrine at that – then we would be wrong. I want to suggest to you briefly this morning, that we celebrate resurrection because as an idea, it sits deeply within us; as an idea, it moves us; as an idea it touches the human condition – who we are, and what we hope for. This morning I want to begin with the film, *Life is Beautiful*. I want to examine our clip, and then turn, indirectly to a great 19th century Christian thinker, John Henry Newman (1801-1890) who helped elucidate the importance of ideas and doctrine in human experience and in Christian belief.

Life is Beautiful (La Vita é Bella)

The name of the film, "*Life is Beautiful*" is extraordinary, counter-intuitive. Set in a concentration camp somewhere during World War II, the context would suggest the opposite: Life is nasty, Life is brutish, Life is short, Life is cruel, Life is unjust. And yet we have this title, "Life is beautiful". Let's turn to the scene itself. Let's describe it, and then let's dig-down making sense of it, interpret it.

In this scene, Guido, an interned Italian Jew, having ensured that his young son Giosué is safe, eating among German speaking children of the camp officers (he has been told not to utter a word of Italian – it would be a 'dead give-away'), discovers a gramophone and a record with the great love song, from Offenbach's *Bacarolle* (The Tales of Hoffman) "*Belle nuit ô nuit d'amour*" – "*A beautiful night or a night of love*". We then see Guido, opening the window, turning the gramophone speaker toward it, so that the song may be heard by his wife Dora, in the neighbouring prison. Amid this long-term imprisonment that promises only more pain, Dora weeps, as she hears the sublime beauty of this life-giving music of love. Then we turn to Guido, calling and taking his son Giosué into his arms, as they proceed from the officer's restaurant through the fog back to the barracks. We hear the words of longing, as Guido comforts his sleeping son – but perhaps more himself – as he imagines the beauty of life, ordinary life: Dora waking her family up with milk and cookies, and then intimacy: sharing with his sleeping son, that he would make love to Dora two or three times, "if I can". And then, having lost their way, through the fog, Guido sees the horror of reality: the mountain of skeletons: the weight of death. May I offer three observations.

First, that what we see here is the persistent human aspiration for life, for resurrection. In this story shadowed by death, resurrectional life is always there, peeking through, penetrating the fog. It is in these moments, that we see and feel beauty, before death pushes back again.

Second, the human aspiration for life, for resurrection, is shown by Guido through three key strategies. The first, is the *protection of life*. To shield his son from the systemic brutality around them, Guido pretends that this is a game and that Giosué must do certain things if he is to win points: these things are actions that preserve his own life. The second, is the *radical hopefulness of life*. Despite, all that is happening, Guido still has the capacity to dream, to imagine a better place and time, where normality reigns: milk and cookies, love-making. The third, is the *humour of life*. While we don't see it in this clip, moments later, Guido is marched to his own execution, but demonstrates to his watching son, with a funny walk, that it is all part of the game.

Finally, in this story, resurrection life is about rebellion against what is. Guido is having the final word...and indeed, unbeknown to him, soon the Allies will arrive, sealing his own struggle. It is no surprise then, that the very word "resurrection" has the same root in Western linguistics as the

words *rebellion, uprising*. Resurrection is about the courageous rejection of death – oppression and suffering – as the norm.

Christian Doctrine

And so to Christian doctrine! The idea of Christ's resurrection, that we celebrate this day, and which lights-up Christian belief, as no other idea can, has stood the test of time – not all doctrines have – because it goes to the very heart of human existence and the human condition. If Christ's resurrection had not occurred, it would still be a great, compelling idea.

Over time, the doctrine of resurrection has changed in its interpretation, it has grown and developed. And this is because in all the dreadful ambiguity of human history, we still as human beings strive, reach out for life, in and beyond death.

No matter how secular, we in the 'developed west' become, the doctrine of Christ's resurrection will stand, will deepen, because of who we are and who ultimately God is.