

It happens from time to time when each of us comes across a story, a phrase or a word that really gets you, and it keeps on repeating itself in your head, or in your heart, where it continues to haunt or delight you.

I came across one such phrase earlier this week as I prepared for this homily. The phrase occurs in some of the musings of author E.B. White, author of 'Charlotte's Web'. At this time it is late in his life, and both he and his wife were becoming increasingly frail. It's a dark October evening in the Northern hemisphere, where Autumn had well and truly set in. His wife, an inveterate gardener, is studying a number of gardening catalogues, thinking about what bulbs she should plant for a colourful display early the next Spring. She's so frail she may not make it through the Winter, but here she is, "plotting the resurrection."

"Plotting the Resurrection": - what a wonderful phrase to apply to our readings today, and to the efforts we make for Lent, particularly when you think of the two-fold meaning we give to that verb: planning and scheming.

On the one hand, with the story of Noah, and God's promise to him that he will never again destroy all living things on earth with a flood, we see God already, in that far distant past, plotting, or planning, the Resurrection.

On the other hand, with our works of penance, of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we are joining Jesus in the desert, scheming to beat the devil in us, and so plotting the Resurrection.

An interesting point of today's Gospel is the fact that Mark makes no mention whatsoever of the temptations we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It simply mentions that Jesus was tempted by Satan, and that he was with the wild beasts, and angels looked after him.

I'm intrigued by that mention of wild beasts. Is Mark referring to real animals, or to the wild beasts that we find roaming around in our heads, the cravings we have, the anger, the prejudices, the self-protection we engage in, the fantasies and megalomania that make us the centre of all things? Could these have troubled Jesus too, since we believe that he is as

human as we are, except for sin, and therefore these could be the battles he fought while tempted in the desert.

When we look at the world around us, and notice the tragedies, the disasters, the violence, etc., - where do many of these come from, if not from the wild beasts that originate in our hearts, - and is that truly the world we want to live in?

Thank God, there's also the mention of Angels, the equivalent of our good side, which recognises injustice, the inequality, the abuse that exists in our world, and is appalled by it; which sees the selfishness, the greed and the hunger for power, and looks for ways to curb and change it; which takes note of the poverty, the tragedies and calamities that happen, and the loss of dignity which often goes with this, and wants to help and restore it.

There's a lot of good in our world as well, but whereas it takes only one individual, or one event, to bring about untold harm, it takes the efforts of many good people to undo the damage and restore things to the way they should be.

Let me share the wisdom of a Baptist minister, who could well be more Catholic than we are. He insists that each of us face life squarely, and admit three things: 1) Evil is real; 2) the good are not as smart as they think they are; and 3) the good need all the help they can get; we cannot be good on our own. One of the first and best defences against every sort of evil is the acknowledgement that the good must work together against it. For that reason this Baptist minister recommends the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation. Confession not only cleanses a person spiritually, but also names evil for what it is, - objectifies it, and requires sinners to take responsibility for it. Once evil has been honestly engaged, then with God's grace, and the support of other believers, evil can be overcome by goodness.

And that is what our Lenten efforts are meant to achieve, individually and collectively, so, having started this Lent: How well are you "plotting the Resurrection"?