***Easter Day Address***

***The Bishop of Chichester***

***Chichester Cathedral – April 2025***

*He saw the linen wrappings lying there.* You are what you wear: discuss!The linen wrappings that John and then Peter see, suggest death. This is the Shroud of Turin. It’s what you wear when you are dead.

And what you wear when you are alive is what drives the fashion industry and celebrity status, as *Evita* the musical reminds us: ‘Eyes! Hair! Mouth! Figure! Dress! Voice! Style! Movement! Hands! Magic! Rings! Glamour! Face! Diamonds! Excitement! Image! I came from the people. They need to adore me, so Christian Dior me from my head to my toes!’ So sings Eva Peron.

You are what your wear is a disturbing thought. It suggests that celebrity status is artful and deceptive, reducing the human person to a collection of trinkets that are at best transient and superficial, at worst demeaning and deathly, ultimately inviting us to destroy the handiwork that we have made and adore, if and when it no longer suits us.

And improbable though it might sound, all this is subtly captured in the traditional Christian icon of the harrowing of hell. This shows us what follows Good Friday, when Jesus, who as God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, reveals his triumph over death. Here he is seen clothed in the glory that is proper to his nature, not the artificial handiwork of our human imagining. And we have seen that glory before. It was revealed in the Transfiguration on the holy mountain when Jesus was indeed seen to wear what he is: pure light – interpreted in the gospel accounts as white clothes, whiter than any earthly agency could produce.

Artistic accounts of the resurrection consistently attend to this detail of the white robes, the clothing of an intense light, sometimes covered in his resurrection appearances with a coloured robe which represents an earthly dispensation, enabling him to be seen by those who cannot yet comprehend the dimension of pure light.

Robed in this light, the icon shows Jesus standing on the two gates of death, which he has wrenched from their hinges and then re-used to form a kind of bridge over the dark opening to the underworld, the realm of destruction and shattered life. He stands firmly above the generations of the dead and leaning down he draws out those who have waited longest for his appearing: Adam and Eve. With his wounded hands Jesus grasps them by the wrist. Note, not by their hands, which stretched out in disobedience to eat forbidden fruit, searching for celebrity status. Their hands, our hands, are incapable of effecting the realities of salvation for which, like our first parents we long so desperately.

And nowhere is salvation, exemplified by peace and justice, more longed for today than in northern Africa, the Middle East and Russia where these icons have their origin. In Sudan, Gaza, and Ukraine, Jesus Christ, on this day, holds out the promise of victory over the power of death and destruction, the hope that from the debris of criminal warfare directed against civilians, children, the elderly, and the sick, from shattered homes, hospitals, schools and ancient places of worship, he will stretch out hands to liberate his brothers and sisters, to bring relief, to bring judgement, to vindicate the oppressed and release them from fear. For them, let us earnestly pray: Come, Lord Jesus: convict and turn the hearts of all who are bent on evil destruction, reclothe them in a rightful mind, reveal to them the truth of their actions.

You are what you wear. The victorious Christ, who is about to emerge from the tomb is not clothed in the shroud of death, but in light. And in the Eastern traditions of Christianity, the process of being clothed is a way of explaining Christian faith and the mystery of its identity in baptism.

A fourth century document, called *The Cave of Treasures*, speaks about salvation as being re-clothed. It revisits Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, still clothed with light. They are like God, unashamed in God’s presence. Through wilful, reckless disobedience they lose that likeness. Their light has gone. They are unclothed, and in God’s presence they are ashamed. Imagining a parallel between the disobedience of our first parents, and the parallel obedience of Jesus Christ, *The* *Cave of Treasures* says, ‘On Friday Adam and Eve were stripped and on Friday Christ stripped himself and reclothed them’, reclothed them with the light they had lost, as he pulled them out from the darkness of death.

And that is the significance of our baptismal dignity, which we are about to renew. Again, the Eastern tradition expresses this wonderfully, in a prayer for the candidates for baptism: ‘The Son of the Lord of all has made for you a crown more desirable than that of any sovereign. Brilliant is your garment, like the sun…The fruit not tasted in Paradise has been placed today in your mouth’.

If you look closely at the icons and frescoes that depict this restorative work of the risen Christ, you will see at the head of the gathering of ancient prophets and kings a young person, holding a shepherd’s crook. Who is this? It is Abel, the lad who offered to God a first-born lamb, and, in jealousy, Cain, his brother, martyred him.

The presence of a youth at the very front of this work of redemption is symbolic of those young people to day who are exploring Christian faith. ‘People do not go to church for what they could get sitting at home…they crave something deeper and transcendent’, a journalist wrote last week, commenting on the significant rise of Gen Z men and women attending Church, especially Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and warning the Church of England that ‘it cannot be run like an NHS trust…’, nor, in its hectoring political tone should it resemble a ‘school assembly for old people’.

And from the wisdom of the ages, as we have noted in the art and prayers of Eastern Christianity, the Church offers a challenge to the rising generation to transcend the toxic messaging that carries political self-interest, from the joyless anger of Andrew Tate that denies the inviolable dignity of women, to those reactive voices that ‘treat all forms of masculinity as inherently problematic’.

Fundamental to the practice of the Christian faith is its presentation of the glory of God and the beauty of creation and all life, as God intends for us. The supreme experience and privilege of worship is that it begins to reveal this truth and the capacity of each and every human person, irrespective of age and circumstance, to be the evidence of its reality. Jesus Christ has stripped himself of glory in order to clothe you in glory. For this reason he died for you, in this way he shows his love for you, and he calls you now into friendship with him in the company of his pilgrim people, the Church.

And let us be clear that for the Church, the beauty of music, architecture, art and the sacred drama of the liturgy does not primarily reside the quality of their production or performance: it resides in the capacity of these gifts to give glory to God on the part of all creation, as the means by which we learn to live in the freedom and joy of the kingdom of heaven. These gifts outline a moral perspective on the ordering of global and local politics, in which justice is the emblem of beauty and worship affirms the inclusion and dignity of the poor, the migrant and the voiceless.

Engaging in Christian worship is, therefore a sign of the courage to dare to believe what the risen Jesus says to all those he meets: ‘Do not be afraid’. Do not be afraid to believe that having been exiled from paradise, your vocation is to be reinstated no longer in paradise but on the throne of heaven. Do not be afraid to believe that the cherubim who guarded the gates of Eden will be ordered to worship you as they would worship God. Do not be afraid to believe that food for the banquet has been provided, the everlasting rooms of the Father’s house are in readiness, the treasures of good things have been opened, and the kingdom of heaven has been prepared from before time – for you! And so we fearlessly proclaim: Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!