

TAPE: Alleluia (Stravinsky)

EASTER PREFACE

It's just 100 yrs ago tomorrow that the first Vatican Council promulgated the first of its only two doctrinal decrees, — not the one that you're more likely to be aware of, or that received prominent in the background of the more recent Vatican Council and its aftermath. The occasion was the Sunday following Easter Day, which was an appropriate enough time for a doctrinal declaration about Faith, and the relationships between faith and human reason. For our Christian faith centres on Christ whom we know is risen and alive, who is the cause of our joy and of our hope. The particular issues which were 'live' a 100 yrs ago in theology are not quite the same today, though interestingly enough, and understandably, the question of faith has received a lot of attention in recent years, including of course the 2nd Vatican Council. The doctrine defined a century ago did not, and did not, put a stop to theological investigation; rather, it clarified the field for further investigation — which is one of the functions of the solemn declarations and teachings of any general council of the Church. On the particular points and in the context dealt with by the Council, we know where we stand. The aspects of faith which are being studied and written about today are different ones, not covered or considered by the first Vat. Council; they arise from today's problems and situation, and from the progress of knowledge and thought and theological reflection that has gone on in the meantime. All of this shd. be contributing to a wider and deeper understanding of faith, which remains a gift of

God for which we thank God continually. In Easter, particularly, after the renewal of Lent and the Paschal reminder of the sacrament of Faith we received, the Baptism we live, gratitude and joy in the gift of God should be characteristic of Christian living. But this doesn't mean turning a blind eye to the world around us, or pretending that all is well with the world. There is, for a lot of people, a crisis of faith; in a ~~world~~^{confused} world and society, there are lots of people searching for God (perhaps without knowing it) and also refusing to give Him the submission of self which faith demands; in another direction, the novelties and good things of life have an attraction and satisfaction for people which they haven't had before — what need is there to believe in God? With softness, abundance, licence, the "good life", man can provide for himself, rely on himself. Perhaps after all, the modern 'crisis of faith' in the west is just a symptom of the kind of society we live in. Yet — man can come to a knowledge of God through the world he lives in, even though very many men may stop short or be sidetracked by the very evidence of God's action and being. When a person has received the gift of faith, it remains a gift, freely received; but it can come to be taken for granted, or even forgotten about altogether unless it is nourished and takes deep root in one's life: God doesn't abandon man, fail in His love, or take away what He has given. Though there are difficulties of understanding, which some people do feel most acutely, they are not such as can call faith itself in question, for reason, knowledge and science are not opposed to faith not can they give answers, true answers, which contradict Truth — and difficulties don't make doubts

The confidence and joy that belong with faith are, like faith itself, not our own doing but the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's gift — and this joy comes through, I think, in this music, an Alleluia by Mozart: MUSIC = PRAYERS (+4th Sun. East.)

Mozart:
Exultate,
Jubilate
(RS 174)

In most of the

prayers for the Plains of Easter Week and the following Sunday, the point is made very clearly that faith (the Easter gift) must be accompanied by a life of faith — that faith isn't some kind of abstraction that can be neatly wrapped up and put aside for safe-keeping, like the talents in the parable our Lord told, but (if it is the vital thing it ~~is~~) must influence the way a person lives, his attitudes, habits and actions. The response that God's initiative and gift demands of us must somehow show itself in our human behaviour. This is what that letter of St John is about. ^{which is used ~~for~~ in the liturgy of the Sundays of Eastertide} that you've been hearing at Mass these Sundays. Faith affects what we do, or fail to do, our actions, the principles on which we believe and live. Faith also involves us in a community — the community, first of all, of the three Persons of the Trinity, their life and love; but also the community of Christ's members, what we call the Church. There is a contradiction in thinking one can be brought into one community without the other, that one can have faith without being a member of Christ. The pilgrim church on earth is human, with all the weaknesses, sin and badness that are endemic to human nature — to expect it to be otherwise is not to understand or believe fully in the humanity of Christ ... His divinity is only revealed through his humanity. And lastly, there cannot be a deepening & growth in faith without prayer — and this is still too or too easily lost sight of, because we don't understand our faith well enough.