

**When he said, “The art of keeping the sabbath is the art of painting on the canvas of time the mysterious grandeur of the climax of creation - the seventh day is a mine where the spirit’s precious metal can be found with which to construct that palace, that dimension in which the human is at home with the divine; that dimension in which man aspires to approach the likeness of God.” Abraham Heschel was articulating the very heart of the matter. The Sabbath is the Sacrament of the Day of Resurrection. The former was made for man. Man was made for the latter.**

**+ In the name of the Father...**

**We live in strange times. How many people have said that to you in the past few weeks? How many times have you *thought* it walking down an abandoned street at rush hour, or moving in a slow dance around a supermarket as if everyone’s trolleys were magnetised with opposite polarities? These *are* strange times. But that was true long before the pandemic made the strangeness a subject of every conversation. The point of everything we have been doing liturgically for the past week and a bit, the point, in fact, of everything we ever do liturgically is to help us realise that, even when things around us seem entirely normal, we are *indeed* living in the strangest times imaginable. Stranger, in fact.**

**I don’t know how familiar you are with the Swedish artist Simon Stålenhag - if you’ve *heard* of his painting or writing at all, it is probably because you are a Gamer, or a Geek, or you watch too much TV, and so gobble up *any* new series Amazon Prime commissions. Which, to be honest, a month into lockdown, where Choral Mass is attended on Discord, and everyone has watched pretty much every series Amazon or Netflix or AppleTV have to offer, means most of you probably know his work quite well by now. If you don’t - as you will see in the image below this text - it is a remarkable combination of ordinary representational realism, and dystopian science fiction - like photojournalism might be if it had smalltown Scandinavia as its *focus* - but HG Wells had been allowed to design at least one building or vehicle in every street. It is Aliens meets Fargo - the Mandalorian parking a Renault Megane in a snowy multi-storey carpark. Stalenhag’s books - “Tales from the Loop”, and “Things from the Flood” - portray a resolutely normal-looking juxtaposition of the banal everyday, with the absolutely out of this world. They are naturalistic renditions of the interpenetration of our daily round, with another time or realm entirely.**

**And as a consequence they are works are ideally suited to the Octave of Easter.**

**In truth, if I was going to recommend a form of the visual arts to stimulate in our mind, that thinking, which the liturgy is designed to foster, which mines the spirit of the Easter Octave for its material - it would probably be the work of Dali, or Magritte, before it was Rembrandt’s or Fra Angelico’s.**

**Because, as of the day we marked one week ago, the daily human round - unchanged since the beginning of time - has cohabited with a reality more startling than any product of artistic imagination - where the mysteries of the universe have actually been unlocked, to wander the streets of our very own neighbourhoods, but though many have seen, most have not believed anything peculiar is even afoot.**

**And yet, it is not an overstatement to say, that the only reason any of us are logged on to this gaming platform this morning. The only reason for there to be such a thing as the mass. Is that something happened on one day several thousand years ago, which broke open the notion of counting days, or thousands of years, as comprehensively as a chick shattering its time-bound egg...**

**It happened. We celebrate it happening. We affirm our belief in it. But still here we find ourselves. As imprisoned by time as we ever were. Locked in our upper rooms. By turns feeling the passage of every grain of sand like so many kidney stones. Or feeling the days are not full enough. And the nights are not full enough. And life slips by like a field mouse. Not shaking the grass. Whilst we waste away.**

**Or so it seems. So it will seem, if we remain like Thomas - present to the rumours of resurrection, but not yet entered bodily into its reality.**

**For here is the whole essence of our resurrection faith. That out of the enclosed confines of a finite human life - life itself has emerged - undying and free. That into the shrinking room that is our perpetually frightened avoidance of our own mortality, has stepped - not death - not that intruder whom our doors cannot keep out - not the visitor who will be standing one day in our living rooms, or by our beds, unbidden, unwelcome and unavoidable. But another presence - the opposite of the inevitable - the inconceivable, yet Virgin-born, man Christ Jesus who was dead and behold he lives for evermore.**

**In his entering, this Jesus embodies the freedom our little rooms belie, and embodies the answer to the impossible puzzle of human life for those who believe in a Creator. Why create the material if it is to be left behind like so many bones in the abandoned strata of its own existence? Why create the temporal - let alone declare it as good - if it is to be abandoned like the empty shell of new hatched chick?**

**The answer of the resurrection; the answer the Sabbath suggested; the answer Heschel intuited; the answer Easter unveils is as straightforward as it is astonishing:**

**The material was never going to be left behind. The temporal was never intended to be abandoned. They were made to be incorporated in the Eternal Son of God. They were chosen to take their place in the endless life of Love.**

**But that was long ago. Before the Foundation of the World. And for the most part we have forgotten.**

**All of us.**

**Not just those whose understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...**

**Not just those who managed somehow to turn the rich mines of the Sabbath into pits for an ox to fall in, or graves for the law to strew with bones...**

**Not just 'THEM'.**

**But us. Even us. The redeemed and predestined. The chosen in Christ.**

**We are so prone to losing sight of the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: that even in knowing and proclaiming him as Lord we need to be reminded. We need to be recalled - to do - this - what we are doing right now - in remembrance of Him, continually.**

**Because, in *our* bones, we still think our 3-dimensional selves - our spatiotemporal bodies - are the be-all and end-all of what is real, and we need to be reminded over and over again, that we are both entirely *right* to viscerally object to their being laid aside or disintegrated - as Fr George was spelling out last Sunday - and entirely *wrong* to think of them as their own final form.**

**When Salvador Dali painted his Corpus Hypercubus - that extraordinary flourishing of the vision of St John of the Cross, which you can see below - what he sought to render was the once-for-all act we celebrate in the Triduum - and at every Eucharist: that singular lifting up - that particular moment in time and space which transcends and exalts them both. That pierced instant which is both a tear in our material reality - the fabric of spacetime rent asunder - and a healing, a transubstantiating, a consummation of those same elements which are fractured in it.**

**His chosen medium - as you will know if you are a geek - the tesseract - or hypercube - is a two dimensional representation, of a three dimensional model, of a four dimensional figure. And his purpose, among the mathematics, was to show us that, just as the first and second dimensions of a cube - its lines and surfaces - are not left behind by the third dimension of its volume; just as line and surface *and* volume, are taken up in a four-dimensional *hypercube*, even *as* it transcends and reconfigures what might have been considered the rules of three dimensional space - so the resurrection body of the Risen Crucified One, by *its* lifting up in time and space, does not leave behind the bodily or the temporal, but radically reconfigures them, even as it incorporates them into itself.**

**Which might sound like the sort of cod-science you would expect from a man who considered time to be as malleable as melting camembert cheese, and was most happy waxing lyrical about his moustache.**

**Were it not for the exact *same* point being made by today's Gospel, by the rite of the Mass, by the careful structuring of the liturgical year, and in particular by the notion of the Octave, which is itself a representation of the Resurrection - sketched not on canvas, but on our actual clock faces and calendars.**

**We speak relatively glibly about the Eighth Day, in this part of the Church at least - but a moment's consideration will remind us that an eighth day of the week is no less surreal a concept - no more impossible a construct - than a four dimensional cube.**

**Nonetheless - we didn't make it up. The Church did not invent Octave Days. They have been part of the liturgical practice of God's people since there has been a liturgical practice of God's people.**

**There was the circumcision on the eighth day, that cut the first covenant between God and the seed of Abraham. There is Israel's whole cycle of feasts, with its continual round of sevenths, and sevens - Sabbaths and weeks - culminating in the seven-day Feast of Booths, or rather in its "last and greatest day" - the Eighth Day. And there is, as we will observe at the climax of this season of the Lord's Passover - the pinnacle - literally - and fulfilment of that 'Passover of the Jews' (which is the source of all our liturgy) - Pentecost - the Octave Day squared - 7x7 days from its beginning - the day after a week of weeks - the 50th Day.**

**The Sabbath day was designed from the beginning to enable God's people to recognise, that the first place the Creator dwelt within Creation was not in space, but in time. The first thing declared 'qadosh' - holy - in scripture is the 7th Day. So Sabbath was a way to practice and prepare for the advent of another kind of day entirely. It was a hallowing of time, which implied the sacred spaces of Eden and the Adam were not the final dimension or reality. It concluded God's making of the Man and the Garden, and preceded the creation of Tabernacle and Temple Mount, in order that, in the words of Abraham Heschel - "we might have an example of the world to come".**

**Little wonder then that John's Gospel, which is structured around successive Passovers, and carefully develops across six Temple Feasts, to present us with the new Seventh Feast - the centre of all our Christian Rites - the Pasch of the Christ, should explicitly place the Resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples, on the first day *after* the Sabbath. And then, in case we'd missed the significance - should repeat the identical circumstances, and the identical greeting, unequivocally and unmistakably, *on the Eighth Day* - when the revelation of the Risen One is made to Thomas, the twin.**

**This is what all those eight-sided baptistries and fonts, all those traditions of keeping the Octave of major feasts were always all about.**

**The temporal rendition of what Dali rendered in space. The remembrance of things eternally present.**

**The recognition that, in the Day of Resurrection, we have entered an entirely new dimension - one which gathers up all of God's covenant faithfulness, one which exalts the seven-day creation, and fulfils it in the risen man Christ Jesus, and in the completed temple of his Body.**

**So, today we mark the Octave of Easter, to help us remember that we find ourselves still in the Day of Resurrection, because that day is not just the 'first day of the new creation' - it is the new creation entire. Because there is only one day in the new creation - no evening and morning - one day that does not wane or set, that has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminates it, and the Lamb is its lamp. And we, and all our passing days and nights, are in it.**

**On this day we mark the Octave of Easter, not because we are lingering in the past or nostalgic for its already fading glory, but because our faith claims *this* Easter 'Day the Lord has made' - to be the day the Sabbath was preparing us for, the live reality which we are invited to willingly inhabit every day.**

**And because, ironically, in so far as we fail to recognise and inhabit the singularity of that day, well over 700,000 of the old days ago, we precisely do find ourselves, living in the past.**

**We are doing it right now - living in the past. Living in a way analogous to one that treats the bread and wine as if they were the same after the Eucharistic prayer as before it. Continuing to function in many, perhaps most, areas of our lives - as if our present reality was roughly the same as the reality experienced by every human being from Adam to Christ. As if the Incarnation - and its fulfilment through the lifting up of the man Christ Jesus - hadn't materially and irrevocably altered the cosmos. As if the resurrection was either just an event in the past, that happened somewhere else, to someone else; or an event somehow in our future, at which we might vaguely hope to arrive - as opposed to the transforming penetration once-for-all of heaven itself into your life, and mine; into your body, and mine, that has left our real world really altered - now and to the ages of ages.**

**So we must continue to begin every Eucharist by re-locating ourselves in the Day of Resurrection, by sharing the Eighth-Day greeting "Peace/The Lord be with you".**

**So, every year, we must continue to be reminded by the Exsultet that every Eucharistic Preface recalls, not just the Passover Supper, but the Atoning Resurrection - the 4th Dimension in which all our reality is made transubstantial.**

**So the rites of Easter must continue to re-set for us the primary focus of *all* our liturgies and spiritual disciplines: that we might come to *recognise* the new reality of the Eighth Day - despite our long-conditioned instincts to carry on as if everything was essentially the same.**

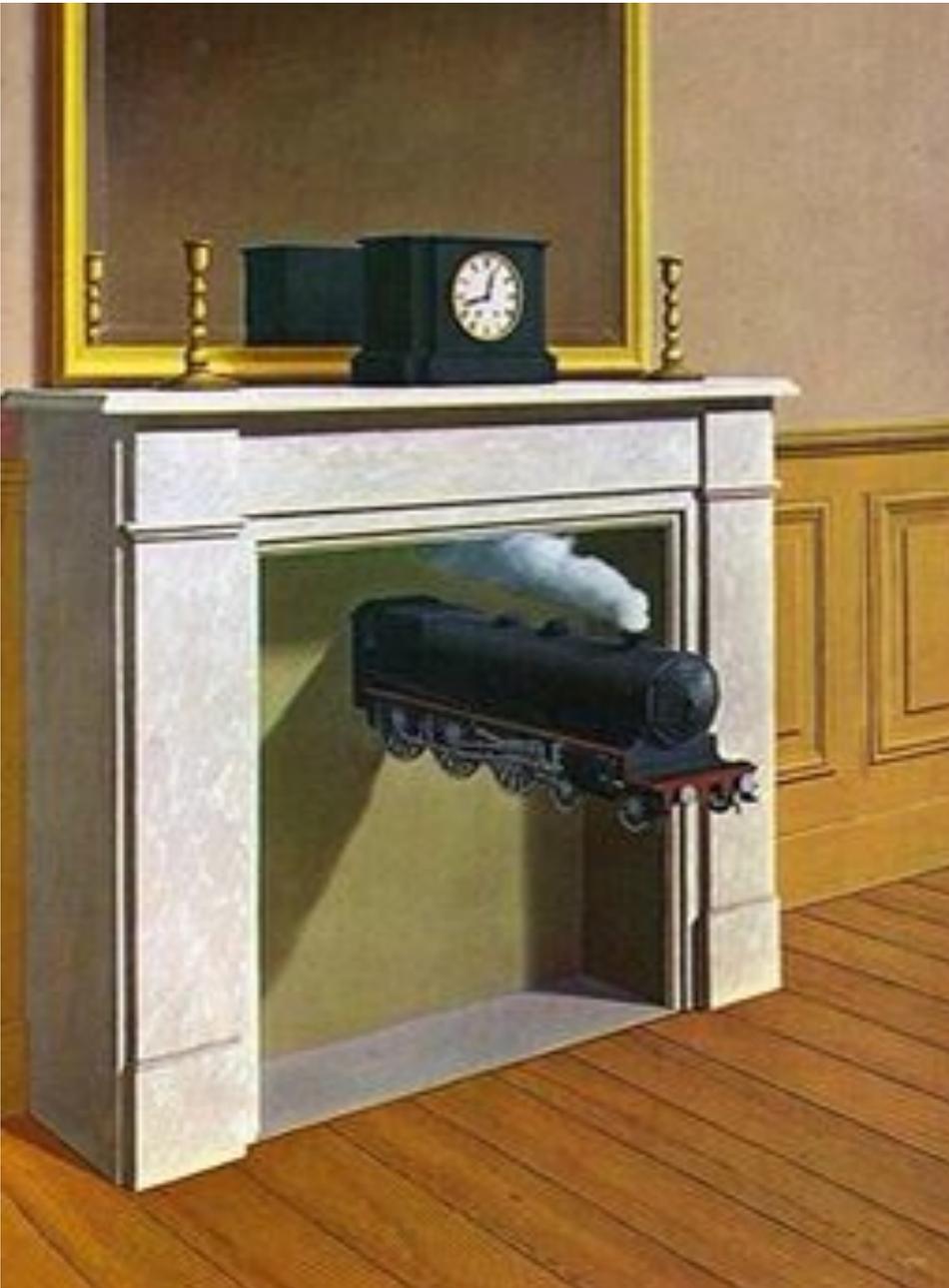
**That we might remember the new human future now present to us in Christ, and perceive what the physical and temporal, and in particular the human, was always intended to be - the vessel that contains the eternal and the Divine, and the gift made from earth and time and breath, which is to find its home in the heart of heaven.**

**Because, it is only when we come to walk in that reality, which even now gathers up our own, that we come to see the things and people and actions of our lives as even now possessed of their eternal significance, and acknowledge, even now, the weight of glory and responsibility in every one of our supposedly ordinary exchanges.**

**It is only then we come to realise, that the whole Christian ethic is derived from our status as eternal beings - that we are charged to forgive, for example, because our choice to retain sins can render them lastingly significant - just as our choice to remit them can see that act of love marked indelibly on the Body of Christ.**

**It only then, we will not only “paint on the canvas of time the mysterious grandeur of the climax of creation”; not only *represent* that “dimension in which the human is at home with the divine, and man aspires to approach the likeness of God”, but finally enter it, inhabit it, become it.**

**Then we will be living, not just in the Sabbath, but in the last and greatest day - the Day of Resurrection. For the Sabbath was made for man. But we were made - all things were made - for this Eighth Day.**



**La Durée Poignardé  
(René Magritte)**



**Corpus Hypercubus  
(Salvador Dali)**

