

Easter Sunday April 16, 2017

Acts 10:34a, 36-43; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9

The feast of Easter is celebrating Jesus' victory over death and mankind's hope for eternal life. This feast gives us the new hope of our own Resurrection at the end of times and at the same time keeps us one with the living Christ who will be always with us. The theme of today's Mass includes both proclamation and witness. St Paul tells us that if Jesus is not risen from the dead, our faith be in vain. In the Gospel Mary Magdalene is asked to go and proclaim the Resurrection to all. To the Disciples the Resurrection was a new experience. It was a total transformation and it gave them a new vision of life. They had been witnesses of his suffering and death and during that time they had remained hidden out of fear. Their hope in Jesus was scattered. The resurrection brought about a complete turnaround and they began boldly to proclaim that Jesus, who died on the Cross, was alive and with them. Later, when they were arrested, persecuted and imprisoned, they rejoiced as they were now even more closely related to the life experience of their Lord through his resurrection. The Easter Sunday was a totally reversal of the image of Good Friday. His death which seemed to be a defeat before the world is now shown as a triumph over sin and death. His death in reality was a passage to new life, to the resurrection of Jesus and hence it was no end in itself. Jesus accepted death in total obedience to his Father that led to his victory.

The Resurrection of Jesus is a mystery which cannot be humanly comprehended. Through it Jesus enters into a new realm of life. He will not die again and his new existence is beyond all understanding. The Risen Jesus enters a completely new way of living. That is why the Gospels are not able to explain the Easter mystery and the Resurrection. They have to use more human terms and speak of the empty tomb, his sudden appearance, eating with them, walking with them, teaching them and commissioning them. One thing is certain that the disciples are aware of his total presence. They know that he is with them and will remain with them. Ultimately the Easter is the celebration of the complete and unending love of the Father for the sake of Humanity. He gave back his son to us for humankind with greater love and with the resurrection Jesus will stay with us forever. This feast of Easter is also for us the feast of hope which tells us that what happened to Jesus will happen to us too. We too will rise one day with him. This celebration forms the heart of our Christian living. It is in reality our faith and the expectation of the future glory.

In today's First Reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter emphasizes the importance of Jesus' disciples not only experiencing and enjoying the joy of their Risen Master and Lord but also of sharing that experience and joy with as many people as possible. It is something we must do also. Not to share our Easter joy and what it means to us is to leave Easter only half celebrated. For the true Christian, in fact, every day is an Easter Day lived joyfully in the close company of the Risen Lord. Peter tells them that they were those witnesses of Jesus' preaching and healing, of his arrest, execution and death and also of his being raised again to life. He tells them that they had eaten and drunk with Jesus after his resurrection from the dead. He says further they have continued doing it every time they take part in the Eucharist that is when they eat and drink with the Risen Jesus. Further Jesus did order them to proclaim this to his people and to tell them that God has appointed Jesus to judge everyone, alive or dead, that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name. In fact that is the mission of the disciples.

The Second Reading of today taken from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians tells us that because we have been raised with Christ, we should seek the things that are from above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. We should set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For, we have died in Christ, and our new life is hidden with Christ in God. Paul's words open to us another dimension of Easter. Not only is it a celebration of Jesus' resurrection, but also of our being raised to a new life with Christ. More than an unequal demonstration of God's power Easter shows that God lives in those who are open to receive forgiveness of sin and life that bridges death. For that person, life is not a matter of conforming to external rules, but of being transformed daily in our thinking, ethics and actions. More than an unprecedented demonstration of divine power, the resurrection shows that Christ now lives in those open to receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of life that bridges death. For that person, life is not a matter of conforming to external rules, but of being transformed daily in our thinking, our ethics and our actions. Behind this brief passage are two powerful elements of the apostolic tradition, one of which Paul himself developed. First is the metaphor of baptism by immersion as a symbolic experience of dying and being raised with Christ. The second is the narrative of the ascension of the risen Christ to the right hand of God.

Today's Gospel from John draws our attention to the empty tomb as the sign of Jesus' resurrection to life. It was the first day after Sabbath, first day of the

Christian week when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb of Jesus. It was a Jewish custom to visit the tomb of the beloved departed at least for three days after the burial. As she approached the tomb she saw the stone rolled back and wondered who could have removed such a heavy stone. She immediately ran to the disciples to inform the matter of the missing body of the Lord. She reported the matter to Peter who was already accepted as the Leader of the group. Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved run to the tomb. They saw the entire scene, they understood and they believed in the act of the resurrection. Till then they had failed to understand the term to be raised from the dead. They saw how the clothes were kept, the one that covered the head had been set apart and rest of the clothes did not look as if Jesus had taken them off or removed by someone else. All were neatly folded and kept. They did believe that he was risen.

For Peter and others, this was the moment of growth in their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Later it is further clarified as he encountered the disciples on the way to Emmaus where he explained the positive meaning of the sufferings of the messiah as found in the Old Testament. The resurrection of Jesus brought a new hope in the disciples and transformed their emptiness into a fullness of light. The word, "Jesus is alive!" or "I have seen the Lord!" were enough to instantly create a great spiritual hunger in their soul the worldly minds of the disciples suddenly became alerted to the truth. Faith was being reinstated in the Words that Jesus had spoken while He lived on earth. They could now understand what it really means to be raised from the dead. In this resurrection is the new creation by the Father. In the book of Genesis we hear of God creating the Universe. Now in the new creation God creates something more than that. He raises his own Son from the dead and gives him to the Humanity as a new gift and commissions him to remain with human kind forever.

The feast of Easter is the confirmation of our faith. Our faith is deeply rooted and finds its real meaning in the resurrection of Jesus. Our faith tells us that Good Friday and the death of Jesus is not the climax of Holy Week. It is only a path in the achievement of the final resurrection. The cross was the high point of Jesus' gift of himself to the father for our sakes and the Father returns the gift of resurrected Jesus to us. Accordingly today's mass invites us with the invitation to proclaim the good news and be witnesses to the risen lord. Easter, however, is not only concerned with recalling the resurrection of Jesus or its impact on the first disciples but also with the meaning of this event for our own lives and for our faith. For the disciples it was something new and unique experience. It was

something out of the ordinary that had taken place. That is why they are notable to explain it in detail. So the evangelists put forward the empty tomb, angels talking, he is coming into the close room and so on. For them it was something like an explosion and something out of the world. Even for Paul it was a sudden experience when the Risen Jesus revealed himself while Paul was on his way to Damascus to bring the Christians into line and he accepts and enters into this experience.

In the Gospel of today tells us how Mary Magdalene went in search of Jesus. She loved her master and was much devoted to him and wanted to remain close the tomb. She was upset with the events that the stone was removed, the body was missing and she thought that someone had deliberately stolen it. She wept at the loss and with the inner burning desire to be near him, to follow Him, to hear Him, to feel loved, to be understood and to be forgiven of sins. In the tomb she sees two angels who ask her the reason for her crying. At that very moment Jesus too is present and he too asks her the reason for her crying. She thinks that he is gardener and looks for his help but Jesus presents himself to her and calls her by name. Only then she understands who he was and worships him. Jesus indeed accepts her presence but gives her the mission. She was asked to go and tell all, starting from the disciples that Jesus is raised from the dead and she has seen him and he has the good news for everyone. He also tells her that he has to ascend to the Father but she has her task to fulfill namely to be his messenger.

The celebration of Easter reminds us that we have the same mission as Peter and Mary Magdalene and the other disciples of Jesus. This requires as the first reading of today tells us that we need a radical conversion, a radical transformation on our part. In the celebration of the Pasch, the Jews used to throw out all the leavened bread they had and replace it with freshly baked unleavened bread. Because of the fermentation process that leavened bread undergoes, yeast was regarded as a corrupting agent. So Paul tells us that we, too, as we celebrate our Christian Passover, are to become "a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be...having only the unleavened bread of integrity and truth." Further, Peter emphasizes the importance of Jesus' disciples not only experiencing and enjoying the joy of their Risen Master and Lord but also of sharing that experience and joy with as many people as possible. It is something we must do also to live joyfully in the close company of the Risen Lord. For the true Christian, in fact, every day is an Easter Day lived joyfully in the close company of the Risen Lord. "He has ordered us to proclaim this to his people and

to tell them that God has appointed Jesus to judge everyone, alive or dead, that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name." There we have our mission.

On this Easter Sunday Jesus calls us to be his messengers. At the same time let us thank God for the gift of the risen Jesus given once again to us. This Resurrected Jesus gives us his message of peace as he gave to all the disciples every time he met them. Today as we celebrate his rising from the dead he gives the same message of peace. We pray that this peace will remain in our hearts always to make us his messengers in the world of today. Easter, however, is not only concerned with recalling the resurrection of Jesus or its impact on the first disciples but also with the meaning of this event for our own lives and for our faith. The celebration of Easter is a call for us to change - and perhaps change radically - as Jesus' own disciples changed.

The train had started moving. It was packed with people of all ages, mostly with the working men and women and young college boys and girls. Near the window seated, was an old man with his 30 year old son. As the train moved by, the son was overwhelmed with joy as he was thrilled with the scenery outside. "See dad, the scenery of green trees moving away is very beautiful." This behavior from a thirty year old son made the other people feel strange about him. Everyone started murmuring something or other about this son. "This guy seems to be a crack." newly married husband whispered to his wife. Suddenly it started raining. Rain drops fell on the travelers through the opened window. The Thirty year old son, filled with joy "see dad, how beautiful the rain is." the young newly married lady got irritated with the rain drops spoiling her new suit. Her husband said "Can't you see it's raining, you old man? If your son is not feeling well get him soon to a mental asylum and don't disturb public henceforth." The old man hesitated first and then in a low tone replied "We are on the way back from hospital and my son got discharged today morning. He was a blind by birth and last week only he got his vision. These rain and nature are new to his eyes. Please forgive us for the inconvenience caused." The things we see may be right from our perspective until we know the truth. But when we know the truth our reaction to that will hurt even us. Let us try to understand the problem better before taking a harsh action.

The late film producer Cecil B. DeMille shared this experience: "One day as I was lying in a canoe, a big black beetle ... climbed up to the canoe. I watched it idly for some time." Under the heat of the sun, the beetle proceeded to die. Then a

strange thing happened. His glistening black shell cracked all the way down the back. Out of it came a shapeless mass, quickly transformed into beautifully, brilliantly-colored life. ... There gradually unfolded iridescent wings from which the sunlight flashed a thousand colors. ... The blue-green body took shape. "Before my eyes had occurred a metamorphosis—the transformation of a hideous beetle into a gorgeous dragonfly. ... I had witnessed ... a miracle. Out of the mud had come a beautiful new life. And the thought came to me that if the Creator works such wonders with the lowliest of creatures, what may not be in store for the human spirit!" My testimony today is that through Jesus Christ we can be born again. We can change. We can change completely. And we can stay changed. Such complete changes require the power of God.

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