

Easter Sunday March 27, 2016

Acts 10:34a, 36-43; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-18

The feast of Easter is the celebration Jesus' victory over death and mankind's hope for eternal life. This feast gives us the hope of our own Resurrection and at the same time keeps us united with the living Christ who has promised to remain 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 of the day Mary Magdalene is asked to go and proclaim the Resurrection to all. To the Disciples the Resurrection of Jesus was something new and unexpected. 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 shattered. The resurrection brought about a complete turn around and they began boldly to proclaim that Jesus, who died on the Cross, was alive. 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. For Jesus his death was a fulfilment of his Father's will as he accepted it in total obedience that led to his victory.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of Christianity. For his disciples it was indeed a mystery. The Easter Sunday for them 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, a victory over death. His dying on the cross in reality was a passage to new life. They were not able to comprehend the fact of Resurrection and grasp the deep inner meaning of it even though Jesus had spoken to them several times during his public life. However it built up their faith particularly because of their experience of the presence of Jesus and made them persons, courageous and ready to face any eventuality for their master. Jesus stood among them, talked to them, ate with them and taught them. They were called upon to build the faith of others and we see how marvellous the living faith of the early Church was. The disciples once they knew that Jesus was the Messiah and that he had been resurrected from the dead by the Father became totally transformed persons. They were ready to face any suffering and even death as it was Christ that was important. Once Jesus had resurrected by the grace of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, it did not take Him long to firmly establish the Mystical Body the Church as the continuation of his mission on earth. Resurrection becomes the uniting factor, building the mystical body of Christ.

Today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, begins with the discourse of Peter who touches on the highlights of what was commonly known about Jesus of Nazareth. He told them that Jesus was God's anointed one who went about doing good works and healing many. Yet he was rejected by his own people and put to death. As in Isaiah's Suffering Servant, death was not the final word in the work of Jesus. God raised him up on the third day. He also emphasized 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. Peter communicated to them that they were those witnesses of Jesus' preaching and healing, of his arrest, execution and death and also of his resurrection. The Apostle told them that they had eaten and drunk with Jesus after his resurrection from the dead. He explained that they have continued doing it every time they took part in the Eucharist that was when they ate and drank with the community in the name of 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. For the true Christian, every day is an Easter Day lived joyfully in the close company of the Risen Lord.

In the Second Reading Paul told the Colossians that because of the resurrection of Jesus their earthly lives are raised to a new status. Since they have been raised with Christ, they should seek the things that are from above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. They should set their minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For, all those baptised have died in Christ, and the new life is hidden with Christ in God. Paul's words open 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 unequalled 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. 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 than bridges death. The risen Christ is now with his Father in glory and at his final coming we too will share his glory. 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 the Father.

Today's Gospel from John draws our attention to the empty tomb as the sign of Jesus' resurrection to life. In this empty tomb story John involves Mary

Magdalene, Simon Peter and himself as his beloved disciple. 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. She was the first one to discover that the tomb where Jesus was buried was now empty. As she approached the tomb she saw the stone rolled back and wondered who could have moved such a heavy stone. Her immediate conclusion was that the body was taken away by somebody. She quickly 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 Jesus was raised from the dead.

The fact that the tomb was empty is confirmed by Peter and the beloved disciple John. They too had sensed the urgency and so they went in haste to the tomb to confirm Mary Magdalene's report. Much has been said about the detail that the younger disciple John outran Peter but most of it seems to be creative speculation. What is really important is what the beloved disciple and Peter saw when they arrive at the tomb. The body was indeed missing but they found the burial clothes there itself. Peter noticed that the head covering had been rolled up separately and placed in a different location from the other burial clothes. The evidence points to two conclusions. First, the body had indeed gone. Second, it had not been stolen by grave robbers or anyone else. Robbers would not have taken the time to remove the burial clothes and put them in places where they could be immediately seen. It was the beloved disciple who was the first to draw the conclusion that more was going on here than the grave robbery. He arrived at his conclusion not from logic or reason but through faith. His faith told him that the body of Jesus had not been stolen. Instead Jesus had conquered death and had left behind those garments that symbolized death. He did not fully understand what his faith told him. He was like others not aware of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. But he was aware that something miraculous had taken place in the tomb.

In the Gospel of today tells us how Mary Magdalene went in search of Jesus even after the disciples went away. 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 saw two angels who asked her the reason for her weeping. At that very moment Jesus too was present and he too asked her the reason for her crying. She thought that he was the gardener and looked for his help but Jesus presented himself to her and called her by name. Only then she understood who he was and worshiped him. Jesus indeed accepted her presence but gave her the mission. She was asked to go and tell all, starting from the disciples that Jesus has been raised from the dead and she had seen him and he had the good news for everyone. He also told her that he was ready to ascend to the Father but she had her task to fulfil here and now, namely to be his messenger.

For Peter and other disciples this was the moment of growth in their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Immediately after the visit to the empty tomb they might have been shocked. This was soon to be clarified to them about the resurrection of Jesus perhaps through Mary Magdalene. Later it was further clarified as Jesus 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 they saw 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.

To the Disciples the Resurrection was a new experience. It was something totally unexpected and new. It gave them a new vision of life. They were persons totally transformed with the presence of the Resurrected Jesus. They had seen his suffering and during that time most of them had remained hidden out of fear. For them as it is for us the celebration of Easter Sunday totally reverses the image of Good Friday. It tells us what Good Friday is about; it tells us that what took place on the cross on Good Friday was not just a simple death but a real sacrifice, it was not a defeat but a triumph over sin and death, and it was not an end but a great beginning. Jesus accepted death in total

obedience to his Father. He told his Father that he was ready to do his will and sacrificed himself for the salvation of the world. His death was a triumph over sin and death. His death in reality was a passage to new life and hence it is no end in itself. Ultimately the Easter is the celebration of the total unending love of the Father for the sake of Humanity. He gave back his son to us for human kind with greater love and with the resurrection Jesus will stay with us forever. The resurrection of Jesus, and later the Pentecost brings change in the disciples. They knew of his presence and Jesus worked many miracles through them. People in Jerusalem too once they saw their work held them in high esteem. The result of their work was that the community increased in numbers.

Today on Easter Sunday the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus 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 change 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."

On this Easter Sunday Jesus calls us to be his messengers of peace. We pray that this peace will remain in our hearts always to make us his messengers in the world of today. The celebration of Easter is a call for us to change - and perhaps change radically - as Jesus' own disciples changed. 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. St Paul says that, if Christ is not raised, then all our believing is in vain. Hence 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.

A friend asked Samuel Morse, the inventor of Telegraph, whether during all his experiments, he had come across a moment or stage where he did not know what to do next. Morse in reply said it had happened to him more than once. There were anxious moments in his life where he was unable to move. Then how did he overcome asked his friend. Morse replied that in confidence he would tell him that in such moments he would just kneel down and pray to God to give him light and understanding. The friend asked him whether he got that light and understanding from God. Morse replied emphatically yes. Therefore he added when he received honours from America and from Europe on account of his invention which bears his name he never even once he felt he deserved them. He had made only a valid application of electricity not because he was superior to others but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, would have revealed it to someone and was pleased to reveal it to Morse.

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