

12 April 2020

Easter Sunday (A)

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians: 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

*Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer your thankful praises!*

*Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:*

*The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.*

*Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!*

*Amen. Alleluia.*

We heard these words in the Easter Sequence sung in between the second reading and our gospel acclamation. This is an ancient hymn that praises our risen Lord, the Paschal Victim, for defeating sin and death. Even now, there is reason to rejoice: Jesus Christ, our Savior, our King, our Priest, has passed over from death to new life, defeating sin and death forever.

The Sequence quotes Mary Magdalene's experience in being the first to witness the empty tomb:

*“Yes, Christ my hope is arisen; to Galilee he goes before you.”*

Yes, Christ our hope has risen. And that hope can transform how we experience everything in our lives right now.

Jesus's apostles were transformed from their fears, their isolation, their denials of Jesus into his witnesses, to the ends of the earth. We heard in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles that Peter witnessed to all that Jesus said and did during his earthly life, but most importantly, to what happened after his death: he was raised to new life, and he once again shared meals with them, to show that he was not a ghost, that we truly raised to a new, glorified body, a body that will not taste suffering or death again.

This risen Jesus commissioned his disciples to proclaim to the people, to witness to his power over sin and death. Thus even though we are physically apart, we can witness, we can proclaim our Christian faith by sharing that joy and hope that Christ's Resurrection brings us, especially now.

Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians that we were raised with Christ, and thus we must seek what is above, must fix our minds and hearts on our hope in God, and not be overcome by the things of earth, like our pain and isolation. Paul is referring to our baptism: we were immersed into Christ's death so that we might also be raised with him to new life.

Once again we see the invitation for “communion” with our Lord, even if we cannot receive the Eucharist physically. We experience our pain and suffering, our isolation with Jesus, so that we can also experience new life with him. Remember that communion means sharing with each other on a deep level.

Jesus did not die in order to take away death, but to transform it, from the inside out. Jesus did not suffer in order to take away suffering, but to transform it, from the inside out. Thus suffering and death have been redeemed, have been transformed into ways to encounter God, and to encounter each other, in love. Because Jesus has plunged into those depths himself, has taken the very presence of God there, and rose victorious.

In our gospel reading, Mary Magdalene comes to Jesus's tomb very early in the morning, while it was still dark. The darkness represents the doubt, fear, confusion that surrounded the disciples after Jesus's death. I think we can all sympathize with Mary Magdalene's emotions right now.

But we're also told that it was the first day of the week: thus, it is a new day, a new week, a new beginning. The beginning of new life.

After she discovers that the tomb is empty, Mary Magdalene runs and tells Peter and the other disciples, not in joy, but in fear and anguish, since she thinks that someone has stolen Jesus's body. So Peter and the other disciple themselves run to the tomb to see for themselves. There's so much movement, so much emotion in this passage that we can identify with.

The other disciple goes into Jesus's tomb, and we're told that "he saw and believed". But we're also told, as the last line of the reading, that "they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

This might seem like a contradiction: the disciples believe, but they do not understand. And we might feel the same way: we believe in Jesus's resurrection, in his victory over sin and death, but we might not understand what that means in our lives right now, in the midst of all this mess. What does it mean to hope in Jesus, in our sharing with him the gift of new life, when there is still so much to be anxious and worry about right now?

As I said before, Jesus did not magically make suffering and death disappear. He entered into those mysteries himself and made God present there. Jesus did not distance himself from us; he did the complete opposite. He has united himself to our humanity so profoundly that he has entered into the very things that makes us question God's providence or love. Jesus has compassion for us; he literally is suffering with us. Thus the suffering in the world right now invites us to share with him all of our questions and confusion, and let him share with us his presence, his consolation, his communion. And share each other's sufferings as well.

And so, we can truly witness, we can proclaim our Christian faith by sharing the joy and hope that Christ's Resurrection brings us. Share the Good News on social media, share it with your families, even if you can't physically be together this Easter weekend. Or, go old-school and call each other up, send greeting cards, something that reflects the joy of this holy season.

In a few moments we will renew our baptismal promises. If you have candles at home, feel free to light them then, because that light represents our baptism, our dying and rising with Christ so that we can live in newness of life. We are baptized only once, but the grace of our baptism must continue to be stirred into flame: that flame of faith that comes from Christ's victory over death. And that faith and hope can transform our lives right now.

That light of Christ can never be extinguished, for he is the one Morning Star that never sets. May we experience that newness of the Risen Lord's life once again.

For the Lord has truly risen. Alleluia!