

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS*** EASTER VIGIL (B)

Gn 1: 1-22; Gn 22: 1-18; Ex 14: 15-15:1; Is 54: 5-14; Is 55:1-11;

Bar 3: 9-15; Ez 36: 16-17a,18-28; Rom 6: 3-11; Mark 16: 1-7

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Anyone who has worked in a parish or retreat house knows how exhausting preparing for and leading the celebrations of these days can be. They are our “high holy days” and we work very hard to make them meaningful for both our congregations and ourselves. When they are over ministers often say they are grateful for the days, but exhausted. During the weeks of preparation and at the liturgies themselves, a large number of lay and ordained ministers are required to fulfill their liturgical roles; they need to know their parts well. In particular, this evening’s celebration has lots of buildup to, it as we pull out all the stops to proclaim the Lord’s resurrection. It is a rich and full liturgy indeed, with its multiple scripture readings, musical “alleluias,” procession, rituals, etc. Having said all this, the selection from Mark’s gospel feels like a letdown – to say the least!

We have been hearing Sunday readings from Mark since the liturgical year began last Advent. We have already heard enough to know that his is a bare-bones gospel, sparse in details and minimal in imagery. So, in a way, we shouldn’t be surprised at this evening’s selection from Mark; it is not unlike the rest of the gospel. But, especially this night, Mark leaves us wanting more – after all tonight we hear the very good news that Christ is risen from the dead! We are tempted, after hearing tonight’s gospel, to rush on to the following passages, where we hope to hear about someone’s – anyone’s – encounter with the risen Christ. What doesn’t help our dilemma is that the passage selected for tonight’s liturgy was the original ending of Mark’s gospel. There was nothing after it! Imagine that!

The oldest manuscripts of Mark’s gospel abruptly end here, with the young man’s message to the women. After announcing Jesus’ resurrection he says, “He is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him as he told you.” My bible includes verse 8 in this ending, “They made their way out and fled from the tomb bewildered and trembling, and because of their great fear, they said nothing to anyone.” Is that any way to end a gospel? Just as we get to the much-anticipated news of the

resurrection, the story ends in fear and silence and without Christ's appearing! Later, the early church will add more to the account and my bible calls these additions, "The Longer Ending," The added verses tell of several appearances of the risen Christ to his disciples.

But let's stick with the original ending of Mark's gospel, for that is what we are given on this most sacred night – not a trumpet-blasting scene of the risen Christ. No, just a word to the women about Jesus' resurrection and directions to where they might find him. Does that put a damper on our songs and shouts of "Alleluia" this evening? Is that all we get – a word from a young man clothed in white that Jesus is risen, followed by a sending word? Then, where does that leave us? What are we to do next? Where shall we go to meet the risen Christ and how will we recognize him if and when we do meet him?

These and many more questions are what Mark raises for us this evening. If he wanted to tie the story of Jesus up in a nice, gift-wrapped package, he would have. Instead, Mark is asking us some profound questions and inviting us to respond, not with dusty formulas we have repeated by rote from the past, nor by citing the doctrine we are supposed to believe – but with our lives.

Suppose we follow the directions given the women and us at the tomb. The word we hear is that we have to leave this place. Thanks to the risen Christ we can do just that: at the tomb we leave behind us the dead works of the past, the wasted and futile efforts invested on things that don't last; we can also drop off at the tomb sins and guilt that have weighed down our spirits; from now on we can give up searching for life in dead places that offer only temporary satisfaction but dry up quickly when we face trials. Fear and anxiety that suck the life out of us can also stay at the tomb; so can violence, grudges, lies, self-glorification, etc. The message we hear at the tombs of our lives is to go, leave it all behind, Christ is risen, and he has forgiven us. Move on, if we want to find him. Where to? The young man tells us – to Galilee.

Jesus' public ministry began in Galilee. At his baptism he was anointed with the Spirit and was acknowledged by John the Baptist as "one more powerful than I" (1:7). With the Spirit and God's power, Jesus began his ministry of doing good, healing the sick and freeing those weighed down by evil spirits. With the young man's message at the tomb, it is as if Mark is inviting us to go back to the beginning

of his gospel and hear the stories again – this time with resurrection faith.

Our faith has set us on a path to Galilee and there we observe what the risen Jesus can do for us: forgive our sins, heal our wounded lives, teach us about God and instruct us on how we can practice our resurrection faith in service to our world. As we hear the Galilee gospel stories anew, we also learn that we do not have to confront the injustices of our world alone. But united with Jesus in prayer, we can “drive out” the unclean spirits (e.g. 1: 21-28; 9: 14-29) that trouble and disquiet our world.

If someone were to ask us, “Where is Galilee?” we would say, “In northern Israel.” But that is not where the young man at the tomb is sending us. Galilee is wherever the empowering Spirit of the risen Christ is found where the hungry are fed; the stranger welcomed; the imprisoned visited; the grieving comforted; the bread of peace broken in community. Wherever and whenever pain is addressed and hope given by Jesus’ disciples, that is where we find the risen Jesus – there is Galilee.

Here at Eucharist, we profess our faith in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. Empowered by his Spirit we can shed our old lives at the empty tomb and share his new life with others as we respond to his call to self-sacrifice in service to our neighbor.

## **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

### **EASTER VIGIL EXULTET**

**The power of the holy night dispels all evil,  
Washes guilt away,  
Restores lost innocence,  
Brings mourners joy,  
It casts out hatred,  
Brings us peace,  
And humbles earthly pride.**

What a powerful prayer this is for us now in this time in our history. Despite the

many unjust events and structures in our world, we are indeed an Easter people, washed in the waters of Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, fed at the table of the Lord. We are called to believe in a God who brings life from our many forms of death and to trust that our God is a God free to work his wonders in endings as well as in beginnings.

“The Resurrection can only be received and affirmed and celebrated as the new action of God, who creates new futures for people and lets them be amazed even in despair. The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus express in new ways God’s freedom, justice and power to bring life even in the face of death.” (Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann).

Every moment we live in justice and peace with one another; we experience the Reign of God. To understand Easter is to live this reality day by day, moment by moment. The tomb is empty, and we are called to seek Jesus among the poor and the powerless and to bring the good news of salvation and the joy of His kingdom to a world steeped in darkness. We are called to share the life of the Risen Christ with those who are entombed in poverty, violence, indifference and satisfaction.

The Easter tomb is indeed empty, but the Lord is alive and working in our world. He is visibly present in the community of Sacred Heart Cathedral. We witness Him as one Who lives among us in large and small ways. He is present in our ministries of simple fellowship to one another and in the multitude of ways we each reach out to give new life and hope to those in need of our care and service. We know that the Lord is alive here among us most of all because the words He spoke are true of this community in ever new and wonder-filled ways:

“See how they love one another.”

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

## **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates’ names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina’s, *“People of Faith Against the Death Penalty.”*

If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Alden Harden #0166056 (On death row since 8/12/94)
- Phillip Wilkinson #0438643 (9/15/94)
- Malcom Geddie #0143501 (9/29/94)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

[FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org)