

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS* EASTER SUNDAY (B)**

Acts 10: 34a, 37-43 Psalm 118 Colossians 3: 1-4 John 20: 1-9
by Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Why do people return to grave sites after the death of a loved one? My parents, my mother's parents and siblings and their spouses are all buried next to one another at a Long Island cemetery. We, their children, pay periodic visits there, pull the weeds, check on the condition of the tombstones and, of course, pray. We also remember family gatherings of food, noise, laughter, squabbles, hugs and kisses – memories of when we were much younger and they were alive.

I suspect that Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb for pretty much the same reasons we visit the graves of our loved ones. John says it was "early in the morning while it was still dark." Of course it was dark; that's how it is at a grave when all we have are past memories of happier days. Without the light of faith and the vision hope gives, the tombs of the dead are always dark places which, while they stir up happy memories, are still places of sadness.

Mary went to the tomb to remember Jesus, the love he had for her and she for him. And she went in the darkness to weep. But when she arrived at the tomb she found the stone removed and Jesus' body gone. She drew the logical conclusion and tells Simon Peter and the other disciples, "they have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him." Jesus was executed in a horrible way and now, to add insult to injury, "they" have stolen his body. Mary had drawn the logical conclusion; even in her grief, her thinking is clear. What else could she conclude? What would we have thought? There is no denying logic and clear thinking. But if all we are relying on is logic, then the story of Jesus is over, and it is "still dark."

Why did Peter and "the other disciple" go to the tomb? Did they doubt the story and want to "get the facts" for themselves? Did they want to examine the scene of the theft and discover the culprits? Did they remember Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "I am going away and I will come back to you" (14:28) and have a slight glimmer of hope that he might be alive? Did they go to the tomb because they were frustrated at the collapse of Jesus' project and just wanted something to do? Did they go to put closure on an inspiring and hopeful part of their lives when they

traveled with Jesus and heard his message and saw his works? Why do you think they went to the tomb?

There is one detail in the story that suggests Peter and his companion weren't just passing by the tomb and thought they would check it out before they continued their journey home – they were running. In fact, it sounds like a footrace to the tomb since the other disciple “ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first.” Maybe the two did remember Jesus' words, maybe they ran to the tomb hoping against hope.

Which is what it feels like when I visit those family graves, hoping for what seems impossible: that on the last day Jesus will fulfill his promise to us and raise us up. What an impossible thing to believe! How, I wonder at the graves, is he going to pull this one off; raise those long dead – and me – from our graves? Well, he wouldn't be able to if he had just died like the rest of us and some nefarious characters stole his body. But he can and will raise us up, if he himself rose from the dead and has a new life to share with us – starting now. With that hope, couldn't we be that “other disciple” who outran Peter to the grave? Aren't we also those who, on this day, peer into an empty tomb and believe what our eyes of faith tell us – Jesus Christ is raised from the dead! And so we are!

Mary Magdalene, at the initial point in the resurrection narrative, is still in the dark. She has not yet seen the risen Lord, the light of the world. She does not have resurrection faith so, of course, she deduces that his body is stolen. Readers of John's gospel are not surprised that Mary arrives at the tomb while it is still dark. Darkness and light have been major themes throughout this gospel from its opening lines: “The light shines on in the darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it” (1:5).

Today's gospel picks up the light/darkness theme once again. In the gospel darkness is the condition of humans turned away from God –sin, alienation, ignorance and death. Jesus' resurrection brings the long-awaited release from the chains of darkness. No longer are humans groping about in darkness, searching for relief and an exit from sin's clutches. Mary arrives in the dark, but John already hints that light is coming when he says it is, “early in the morning.” Darkness is threatened; its reign is soon to end; someone is racing to the tomb who will look into the tomb and see with the light of faith.

Mary looked into the empty tomb and saw a missing body. Peter looked and saw the same. But “the disciple Jesus loved” looked, “saw and believed.” He saw the neatly folded burial cloths, the reminder of a dead body. But he saw more. Jesus had left death and its trappings behind. Was it love that enabled the other disciple to see the truth of what had occurred? Is it love, our strong bond with Jesus, that sustains us through the many deaths we endure even before our body dies? Of course, it is faith which urges us to trust in hard times. And, yes, it is hope that keeps us looking to the future when the present weighs us down.

But the disciple who believed was the one, John tells us, Jesus loved. It is the awareness of being loved by Christ that puts fire into our prayer and zeal in our service, for we know the One who loves us will never let us down. With the assurance of that love, we continue to believe and cling to hope. We are like the beloved disciple; we are asked to believe without seeing; without definitive, tangible proof that the Lord is truly risen. But we have proof of Jesus’ love for us: we are the beloved disciples. Jesus’ life, especially his passion and death, were signs of that love. He wanted his love to live in us so that we, like him, would also reflect God’s love to others.

John tells us that it is “the first day of the week,” and he is once again alluding to the book of Genesis – something John has done throughout his gospel. On the first day of creation God overcame darkness by creating light. Now, John suggests, God is doing that again in Jesus’ resurrection. It was dark, but the light is piercing the darkness. The faith response of the beloved disciple is a sign of that. It is in the very bleak darkness of the tomb, not on some sunny mountain, that the disciple believes.

We to believe, or struggle to believe, in the dark tombs when: a loved one dies; a marriage falls apart; a job loss requires a big shift in our lives; old age begins to draw the curtains on our lives or sickness restricts us, etc. We are in the tomb; “it is dark” – there are no reassuring signs. Still, we remember Jesus’ love for us and we express our faith again, “Jesus is risen from the dead!” With that proclamation we are assured that the One who loves us will also help us conquer death in all its guises.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

Then the other disciple [the one Jesus loved] also went into the tomb,
the one who arrived at the tomb first,
and he saw and believed.

Reflection:

The disciple who believed was, we are told, the one Jesus loved. It is the awareness of being loved by Christ that puts fire into our prayer and zeal in our service, for we know the One who loves us will never let us down. Jesus' life, especially his passion and death, were signs of that love. He wanted his love to live in us so that we, like him, would also reflect God's love to others.

So, we ask ourselves:

- When have I experienced new life spring up in a person or situation I thought was hopeless?
- Where in my life do I feel dead and need to experience the risen Christ?

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:

- John R. Elliott #0120038 (On death row since 5/4/94)
- Wade L. Cole #0082151 (6/14/94)
- Marcus Robinson #0348505 (8/5/94)

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

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