

Easter Sunday – Mass During the Day

March 31, 2013

Readings: Acts 10:37-43; Colossians 3:1-4 John 20:1-9

“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him.” This simple, reasonable and predictable statement of fact from Mary Magdalene serves as the backdrop for the most amazing events of the very first Easter Sunday. How could she have known the true depth of her statement? It was eminently practical but mysteriously spiritual and prophetic.

St. Luke’s account of Easter morning specifically mentions that other women were with Mary Magdalene. What were the women thinking to themselves that morning? They were still in shock; they simply wanted to be in the presence of Jesus, to anoint his body, yet they did no real planning to facilitate this. In Mary’s ardent desire to be with Jesus, perhaps she forgot all about the detail of the stone; she only knew that in faith, she had to be with him. The women simply wanted to be there.

Their instincts were correct, as something drew them to the tomb. Was it really all over? Perhaps they simply could they not believe it and had to see again for themselves. Or, could their faith have drawn them there hoping against hope that he would have risen?

To whom did Jesus appear first? To whose ears did the news first reach? To the learned, the clever, the prepared, the logical, the teachers, the important people? No—He appeared first to those who were his most faithful disciples— those who would hope against hope. I speak of Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast seven demons and often seen in tradition as the sinful woman who anointed the Savior’s feet in a city of Galilee. These women indeed were “hoping against hope” that Jesus would not leave them orphaned—they believed in his word.

In an Easter homily both masterful and challenging, St. Ambrose of Milan invited his listeners to look into their own hearts on Easter.

There are some... who seem to be seeking the Lord, but since they are slothful, and strangers to virtue, they do not deserve to find Him; nor, when found, to see Him....And you, what is it you are seeking in the Church if not Jesus, that is, the Savior?...Therefore, drive the darkness from you, brethren; that is, all sinful desires, and all evil works, and provide yourselves with sweet spices, that is earnest prayer.¹

Whom do we seek on this great day? Do we even *deserve* to see Him? From the perspective of our own human weakness, we certainly do not. God willing, amidst all of our different situations and in varying ages of our life, we came here today to give voice to our belief that the empty tomb is a symbol of triumph over death, the beginning of new life and hope for a world in need of a Savior. He came to save you and me, and we can see Him with the eyes of faith as Risen.

From the looks of the crowds that have attended this year, there is no question that many hundreds of you have made the decision to come to church today. I myself am convinced that in part this is due to the efforts of the Archdiocesan Re-Discover Catholicism program launched this year. It is working—many of my brother priests have also noticed greater numbers in the confessional as well as at Church. These are great signs. For those of you attending today, perhaps you were not in Church last year for Easter. The important thing to note now is that you are here, and that is great news. We want to serve you and help you to find a welcoming place here in Church. We are graced by your presence.

¹ St. Ambrose, sermon #34 on Easter, PL 17, 671.

Jesus Christ rose for the four-year old little child who innocently approached the Cross Friday to kiss the feet of Jesus. Jesus Christ rose for the single person who traverses this world at times feeling alone, overwhelmed by the cares with which he or she must contend on a daily basis. Jesus rose for the elderly woman, widowed for many years, having outlived so many friends and relatives.

Jesus rose for the business executive, on whose judgment rests the employment of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people. He rose for the prisoner who has fought the demons within for so long yet finally lost the battle, committing a crime, robbing another of his dignity. He now sits alone, contemplating a future removed from society. Jesus Christ rose for them just as he did for us.

Because of this, the greatest of all gifts, there is no need to enter the tomb—it is empty. And yet I ask you— “Unless we spread the Good News, what difference does it make?” An empty cave in itself is meaningless. Unless we proclaim with joy and hope the reason for its emptiness, it remains a symbol of defeat, as does the Cross. But Jesus Christ changed all that—if we are to be his disciples we must not fail to proclaim that there is more than what we see.

The symbol of defeat has been transformed into an instrument for our salvation. The emptiness of the tomb serves to remind us that the whole world’s space cannot hold Him who comes from heaven and who must return there. This is our call; the cause of our joy.

We must not remain sitting here—we must go, tell his disciples, tell Peter, tell all that the emptiness of the tomb has brought about the fullness of life in us. He has been raised; he is not here. Go forth to proclaim the Good News.