

Reading I: Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

***This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.***

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."

***This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.***

"The right hand of the LORD has struck with power; the right hand of the LORD is exalted. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD."

***This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.***

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

***This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.***

SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1-4

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

The word of the Lord.

Gospel: John 20:1-9

+A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord

from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for Easter Sunday 2022**

There is a context to the first reading from Acts. This is some time after Pentecost. The disciples are now fully apostles. Disciples are followers of a teacher who teaches them. Apostles are missionaries and now teachers themselves. This event was in the town of Caesarea. Gentiles have just received the Holy Spirit as did those disciples who gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem on Pentecost. It is in this context that Peter spoke. The words he spoke present what we call the Kerygma, or basic belief in Jesus of the early Church. When Luke recorded it in his second volume, it had been taught solely through preaching and word of mouth.

There were two points that caught my eye. The first was the statement, "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree." This, for the Son of God, Messiah and Savior was great ignominy and scandal. Who are they? By this time, since Peter preached to a gentile crowd, or congregation, it was clear that there were no more in-roads to be made within the Judaic community. Jesus own had rejected him. Presumably, out of rejection the "they" were Jews.

However, as we believe today, no one had responsibility for Jesus suffering and death. Jesus chose it freely as he followed God's will and plan. Jesus was on a mission to save even those who refuse to believe in him. Faith is a gift from God who gives it in God's way and time. As Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done," "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" and, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." These are the prayers of a man who acted with the grace of God and fidelity to the reason he was born. We can never forget the gifts of God.

Peter also said something else interesting. "This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance..." This backs up the giftedness of faith that I noted above. People who believed had faith solely by God's grace and will. This took the burden off the apostles when their missions led to failure, hardship and persecution. People may see our witness to faith; but faith and salvation are gifts only God can give.

Paul has written, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above." What does that mean? Are we to detach ourselves from this life? Are we to escape this world and its problems? Who's going to pay my bills? We are all alive and need to face this life; sometimes full on. Our parish will close this year. Are we to sit back and say, "O well?" Paul had a sense that Jesus' return would be soon. He instructed his congregations to be ready for that for this world would soon pass away with the establishment of the Kingdom of God. He also tried to teach people to avoid temptation and sin as they turned to Jesus. Again, context is important to note.

With Paul's later letters, he nuanced his message as he encouraged the believers in Jesus to be faithful as they lived their faith in Christ. Jesus' soon expected return seemed delayed. His writings changed with this dawning reality. For Paul, living witnesses to Jesus were the best

means to spread the gospel of Jesus. These words can also mean to seek Christ who shares God's throne. Seek Christ in all events, people and things. Jesus is here, with us at the same time as he is at the Father's right hand. Jesus will return too. We used to pray the mystery of faith in this way, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." Each believer, each of us reveals, with our witness the mystery of Jesus' presence.

I had, as a kid, a Saint Joseph's Daily Missal. It was cleverly laid out. In the days when mass was in Latin and not in anyone's living language, one could read, with the priest the prayers in Latin, follow his prayers in English or explore the book. It had devotions and prayers, explanations of the mass, vestments and things in the church. It also had artwork and pictures. I still have it. I got it in 1963; it'll be sixty years old next year. Some of them were cartoon drawings, well done and realistic to depict the parts of the mass and the actions of the priest. Some were contemporary paintings of saints, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Some of them were famous paintings by the likes of Caravaggio and da Vinci.

Perusing through these helped to alleviate boredom. They also have formed my early imaging of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension and Pentecost. They were graphic in their iconography and painted a picture of how it must have really looked. To see Jesus' glorious, though still wounded body triumphantly draped in fine cloth, clutching a scepter shaped like a cross and with a tiara-like halo was impressive. Surely this is how the rising of the Lord looked on that first Easter dawn.

However, John's gospel is the complete antithesis of that vision. All we have is an empty tomb with Jesus burial wrappings on the slab where his body had lain in death. How anticlimactic; not even an angel or two to announce these glad tidings. If that weren't enough, the first person to notice the tomb's lack of a body, jumped to the conclusion that someone actually stole it; a body snatcher or grave robber! How completely wrong does this seem to be? Then, if that weren't bad enough, Peter, the prime pope arrived! Surely he would be a better witness. Sadly, he saw the tomb and missed the significance of the missing Jesus as well. But wait; there was another who arrived before Peter, the beloved disciple. He saw the emptiness and believed. Christ is risen! Truly he is risen! This is not what we would expect. Yet this is today's gospel of the Lord.

I can perform a few card tricks and make coins disappear only to be found behind someone's ear. I make no bones about these as being illusions and not magic. Each has behind it a trick or subterfuge. The paintings I studied as a boy in my missal have never been my experience of the risen Lord. I have recognized him when gathered with others, in my prayers, as we break bread or as I prepare a homily or reflection like this one. I have seen him reflected in those I encounter; strangers, loved ones and even enemies. Granted they are subtle evanescent glimpses, but powerful.

Today our plates can be filled with problems and troubles. Wars rage all over the world; Ukraine, Somalia and Syria are good examples. Death is all around. We face a seemingly unending pandemic, global warming, a fractured society, bigotry and the messes we carry personally. The three local parishes of St. Eugene, Our Lady, Mother of the Church and Divine Savior must close, merge and form a new parish. There seems to be no respite. All today's gospel has given us is emptiness.

All we seem to have is prayer. Prayers don't stop bullets, bombs, viruses or cool the climate. Having faith is no shield or prophylactic against pain. There is no magical panacea. To focus on

our emptiness and lack of control is as futile as waiting for some divine intervention. What do we have? We have life, love, faith and each other. God saves people not situations. To expect a simple prayer or millions of prayers to change our world is naïve. Jesus taught us a prayer, The Our Father. It is simple and direct. We pray to do God's will and to accept it. We pray for God to give us what we need in life, but also to strive for the kingdom. We also pray to forgive those who have hurt us. The prayer is for God to mold us into people God wants us to become and to participate in our life's journey with everything we have. We forget that God works through us in the way we speak to people and how we treat them. It is our behavior for which we are responsible to God, not someone else's. God saves the world one person at a time. As the song sings, "Let it begin with me."

The tomb was empty because the hearts of Jesus' believers can be filled with Jesus living presence. Our prayers and intentions are the means that God uses to change us and to accomplish God's greatest desire to enter more intimately into a relationship with God's beloved; you and me. We may find God reflected in people we meet. We may know Jesus as we gather to break bread. We may recognize God's presence in the beauty that always surrounds us. We may know Jesus in moments of our pain; for he experienced it too.

The gospel is always a surprise. Jesus reverses our suppositions. God died the death of a criminal as a sacrifice for our sins; not just for the sins we have committed and confessed, but the sins we have forgotten and hidden and all the sins we are yet to commit. The emptiness of the tomb became the fullness of his followers' hearts. So full were they that today we believe and can proclaim, "Christ is risen!" and respond, "Truly he is risen!"

If I contemplate all the problems of the world and in my own life, I have little power to change situations near and far. I am powerless when it comes to solving the world's problems. I have enough trouble trying to lose five pounds. But yet, when I stop to reflect, pray instead of fret, I know God hears what I offer. Because, when I listen in silence I can feel hope for Jesus is near in those moments. For as Paul said, "I am therefore happy to boast of my weaknesses, because then the power of Christ will rest upon me. So I am content with a life of weakness, insult, hardship, persecution, and distress, all for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Second Corinthians, 12:9-10; the Revised English Bible. Paul may have lived a long time ago, but I have known the dynamic he described.

I cannot end the pandemic. I can get a booster and wear a mask in public. I cannot stop an invasion of foreign troops. Prayer seems an ineffective weapon. But our prayers are neither for defense or offense. They are the means God uses to enter more intimately into our lives. In God we find the gift of Hope along with Faith and Love. I may not persuade another with all my eloquence to my opinion. But I can offer respect and listen to them. I cannot stop others from doing wrong; but with God's grace I may change. God's forgiveness is also God's healing.

Seeing the empty tomb is not the same as seeing the risen Lord, Jesus. This gospel has a context too, just like today's other readings. The gospel was written many years after the events they describe and by people who had time to reflect on them. That happened after Pentecost when by grace and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, all the pieces fell, through faith, into place. The tomb they found empty, but together their lives were filled with the Risen Lord Jesus. What we have read, we read in light of faith and Spirit too. Our faith is not from the day of Resurrection, but from Pentecost.

I prepare these reflections based upon my reading of the bible passages and by some good commentary. I am not a scripture scholar but a mere student of scripture. To augment my ignorance, I have some good sources for further reading and prayer. In one of the articles I read was a poem by the late priest-poet, J. Janda. This quote caught my eye and moved me. "Sins are seeds from which flowers may grow but only after they are buried in Christ our earth." This captures the mystery, power and wonder of the empty tomb and message of Easter surprise.

May the Risen Jesus heal our fear and fill our empty places.

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