

Easter Homily
April 12, 2020 Year A
Acts 10:34a, 37-43 / Col. 3:1-4 / Jn. 20:1-9
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**“I shall not die but live”
I have seen the Lord”**

In the midst of EVERYTHING, we are an Easter people and our God lives! Today we celebrate the most central event in human history. Christ’s Resurrection is real, God’s covenant promise is fulfilled to all people for all time. Without the Resurrection the cross is just another terrible tragedy and our hope is in vain (1 Cor. 15:12-19). We can take away from this first Easter story two great – **hope filled** truths – that do help us today.

First: God will ALWAYS surprise us. Consider: While the first *human* witness of the Lord’s resurrection was Mary Magdalene, another witness preceded her. **THE FIRST WITNESS IN ALL OF CREATION WAS –THE STONE THAT SEALED THE TOMB.** Mute, motionless, lifeless. Stumbling blocks will always hide Christ’s presence. Yet, we know, that rock **rolled back**—even after being secured and sealed under maximum security by the Roman soldiers. The psalmist reminds us: “**I shall not die but live!**” A mere stone had an essential “role” in revealing the glory of the risen Christ.

Our Spiritual lesson: Big and small stones surround our living and limit our freedom, joy, and health, especially with the coronavirus, covid 19. We feel weary and fearful, a bit depressed and burdened. Our Easter grace helps us to believe: God rolls away the stone! Jesus is risen and walks with us through these hard and challenging times even though we don’t see clearly. Jesus has told us: “**I will rise.**” “I will leave you, but I will send my Spirit to be with you.” The rolled rock, and the empty tomb, promise new life. We are not alone.

Our second hopeful lesson comes from its first witness...**a woman**, Mary Magdalene, **that one** with the sinful reputation! The one from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Lk. 8; 1-2). She came in the darkness to be with her crucified Lord, to whisper her love and gratitude one last time. How many of us do as she -- visit our most beloved family at the cemetery, offering our love and gratitude memories, knowing they are yet with us. We can only imagine Mary’s fear as she approached: the stone had been moved (!) and then, her wonder, and questions. She, the first human witness, took her stumbling faith and its unfinished discovery to the apostles, “I have seen the Lord”.

Our spiritual lesson: This is very big in our spiritual life – witnessing what we experience, even though it may be incomplete or raise questions. Seeing the stone rolled back and the empty tomb -- worry and wonder entered Mary’s heart. Who could help her make sense of the moment? She models humble faith. In our life, we need to ask our questions, seek advice, and take our wonder to other believers too. Do we witness to our faith by our lives, wherever we find ourselves?

Following her surprising announcement to those locked away in the upper room, Peter and John **run to see!** Did they think she was imagining this or did they question: “How could **she** be a conveyer of this great truth - the first to see? This year, John is telling us, and he wants us to know that HE has gotten there first. While this may have been a bit of brotherly competition between Peter and John, a great lesson is within. Love always leads the way. Love wants to act and serve. Consider all who are NOW putting themselves out there (!) – love leads the way.

We can only imagine how full John's heart was as he ran toward the tomb. Did John's heart already know? He saw the burial cloths; did he pause, remembering all Jesus had promised in those last intimate days? When something (like this deadly virus) is beyond our mental and emotional reach, we too, pause, try to take it in within our heart's understanding. John, I am sure, was grateful that Peter was coming. Matters of great faith, NEED our shared understanding and acceptance – for, when “Two or three are gathered together....”

We know in profound ways today, even as our “gathering” is spaced out, that we are “**A PART**” while “*apart.*” We are **A Part** of something significant, sacrificial and sacred, Everyone's Easter spirit is needed, giving ourselves in service for others.

The beginning of the Resurrection at an empty tomb starts with great confusion and non-clarity. But it is Mary who returns to the tomb a second time and has a conversation with one who she believes is the gardener. All that has happened in her life is still stirring in her mind. Her isolation, her sinfulness and past struggles return to her heart. She stands there with her past sorrows wanting to know how her love for Jesus is going to go on. Sometimes we ask that same question. But, we can believe, Easter puts a twist on all our sorrows. Mary only knows, with certitude, when she hears her name, and she puts ALL the pieces together. She knows His voice! She knows, He is Lord. He is HER Lord. God was with her and God is with us.

God's hope and love are imprinted in our hearts as we serve the critical needs of our world today. In the midst of all the sacrificial service that we are witnessing, we like Mary Magdalene, can echo the same unexpected joy as we use technology to reach friends and family: “In the midst of so much, we can also shout out that in these days: “We have seen the Lord.” Alleluia!

I wish a very happy Easter and God's blessing on all of us as we live in solidarity with everyone in our world.