

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
EASTER SUNDAY
March 31, 2024

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 10:34, 37-43	We know him because we have experienced him.
Colossians 3:1-45	We share in the Resurrection; let us live worthily.
John 20:1-9	The disciples testify that the tomb is empty.

John:

In each Gospel, women are the first disciples to go to the tomb. Three of the four relate that Mary Magdalene was there. They are portrayed as having the most devotion and respect for Jesus. They are not paralyzed by fear and remorse as are the men. To these women belongs the privilege of first witnessing to the Risen Lord. The male disciples find only the empty tomb. They do not know the full meaning of this. John says it is because the Holy Spirit has not yet come. He records the experience of the “beloved disciple,” not the writer himself apparently. This beloved one can see the meaning of the empty tomb. He is given to the community as the model of Christian faith. He has not seen, but he has believed. We do not know precisely what the content of his belief was at this point, only that his privileged relationship with Jesus makes him ready to believe, ready to be open to God’s workings in his life.

The way the wrapping linens are arranged indicates that the body was not stolen. Whatever happened here has to be from God. Robbers would not have folded the linens carefully!

The Gospels are very honest about the disbelief of the disciples. These texts do not whitewash or gloss over the faults of those early Christian leaders. They were slow to believe. Their grief and their fear stood in the way of faith. Blinded by their own limited expectations, they were still struggling to comprehend the power and meaning of God’s purposes. Believing in the Risen Lord would mean that they had to accept a new horizon for God’s purposes, a new vision of God’s purposes for them, too. Their lives would have to be powerfully transformed by the Spirit of the Risen One. They could no longer live as before, given only to earthly realities.

We, too, are slow to believe. We fear having to live up to the consequences of our transformation. The price to be paid is that we must become responsible for the good news that we have heard. We must live by the standards of the One who is Risen. We can no longer live in the arena of sin and death. Once we have seen the light, we cannot live in darkness any longer. Once his tomb is empty, we can no longer live in ours. We must come out from among the dead and take our place among the living.

Mary, the “beloved,” and Peter each have their own processes by which they come to faith in the Risen Christ. They represent the various timings by which the rest of humanity can come to believe. Each needs to take the time and to use the resources that are particular to that individual. Mary gets there first; the “beloved” one comes before Peter but does not enter; he peers inside. Peter enters first, followed by the other disciple. Faith has to be individualized,

drawn from one's own experience in life. We need to be patient with ourselves and with others when it comes to faith. Not everyone moves by the same rhythms. We must respect the work of God in the hearts of persons. The light shines from a different angle for each of us.

Easter morning breaks in on the world to bring hope of salvation for every man, woman, and child. There is a life to be lived with God and with one another.

Acts:

Peter brings the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus to the household of the Gentile centurion. Even before Paul was sent to the Gentiles, Peter had already made the breakthrough whereby the Good News was not for Jews only; the Gospel is also addressed to the Gentile world. The sermon of Peter is taken from the preaching of the early Christian community. It is a summary of Christian beliefs addressed to those about to be baptized. The message is even now formulated in an organized and programmatic manner. 1. God's salvation comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 2. All are called to repent and accept that gift. 3. The witnesses are "those who ate and drank with him." Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist even today, we, too, become those witnesses, since we do in fact "eat and drink with him."

Colossians:

The author points out that Christ's resurrection has led to his being enthroned "at the right hand of the Father in heaven," an expression which asserts the divine right of Jesus and his equality with the Father. Jesus shares the glory and power that belong to God alone by right. Through baptism, all those who believe have been called to a special destiny: glory and power for everlasting life in the presence of God. For us, this will be completed in the final coming of the Lord.

PRAYER BLESSING OF THE FONT OF BAPTISM AT THE EASTER VIGIL

Father of mercy,
through these waters of baptism,
you have filled us with new life as your very own children.

BLESSED BE GOD!

From all who are baptized in water and the Holy Spirit,
you have formed one people,
united in your Son, Jesus Christ.

BLESSED BE GOD!

You have set us free and filled our hearts with the Spirit of your love,
that we may live in your peace.

BLESSED BE GOD!

You call those who have been baptized
to announce the good news of Jesus Christ

to people everywhere.

BLESSED BE GOD!

You have called your children
to this cleansing water and new birth,
that by sharing the faith of your Church
they may have eternal life.
Bless this water in which they will be baptized.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

REFLECTION

The Triduum (The Three Days) should be spent in prayer and contemplation. Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday are not ordinary days. We can only stand in awe before the Lord. It is better for us to stand in wonder at the marvels of God's love and mercy on our behalf.

The Sacred Triduum constitutes the holiest of all the days in the Christian calendar. Lent ends on the evening of Holy Thursday. The Season of Lent has been a time of enlightenment and purification for the elect and for us who are being re-enlightened and re-purified each year. With the Three Days, we enter into an entirely different space. Not Lent, now!

Holy Thursday: As we celebrate the mysteries of the Last Supper of the Lord, we are challenged to undertake our ministries of service in God's world. If the Lord washed our feet, are we not expected to perform the very humblest services for each other? Our work in the world can be sacred if we take up the task that God has given us with eagerness and enthusiasm. Jesus kneels at our side, washing with us the grime of sin from the foundations of his Father's creation.

Good Friday: Today marks the Church's experience of dying with Christ. We, too, are being crucified. We are called into total surrender to God's will, a complete emptying of self, of self-will, of selfishness; death to all that is sinful. We can only wail our condition. We cry out to God from the depth of our desolation. The solemn intercessions afford us our only hope. We raise our voices from the despair of the grave, calling out for mercy, for ourselves and for all the world. The most ancient practice of the Church was that only the bishop took Communion on this day, and he from the Bread of pre-sanctification (made holy the day before); nothing is holy on this day. Eucharist is not celebrated; the faithful can only watch in prayer and in repentance. They fast even from the Bread of Life. Since the reforms of the Liturgy of Holy Week in the 1950s, we are allowed to take Communion on this day but only from the Bread "presanctified," like the bishop.

Holy Saturday: This day does not exist in the Church's calendar. It is a vacant day. Nothing is done that day. The Church waits at the tomb. We are like the living dead, walking around in darkness, with no Lord in sight. We feel the murkiness of the grave. So, we clean the church; we clean our homes. We do not know what else to do!

(See The Catechism: # 1168-1171)

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