

EASTER SUNDAY

Gospel: John 20:1-9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

REFLECTION 1: FROM AN EMPTY TOMB TO APPEARANCES

If you have lost someone you loved, you know all about grief. Psychologists have mapped the process of grieving into what Kubler-Ross called 'The Grief Wheel'. It begins with disbelief, shock and numbness. Then the wheel moves to guilt, anger, bargaining and resentment. Finally you emerge from despair and the wheel brings us to acceptance. The disciples experienced this barrage of emotions as they came to grips with what happened to Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus was something they couldn't believe. How could it be possible that Jesus was really gone? They ran from the idea; they ignored it as they wept and fell into depression. On Easter morning from their turmoil came the equally impossible news – Jesus lives! Great joy must have filled their hearts and the Easter story fills our hearts as well.

Few of us relate in a truly personal way to the fact of the resurrection, except perhaps as a past historical event, whereby Jesus' death on the cross was vindicated, or as a future blessing we hope to enjoy. But the heart of the resurrection calls us to a continuing and ever more profound recognition of that reality as part of our daily lives. As the gospels disclose, even Jesus' contemporaries did not anticipate his resurrection – each of the resurrection stories contain evidence that his disciples had despaired of him as the long-awaited messiah. Even when the empty tomb was discovered, no one concluded that Jesus had risen. Indeed if the empty tomb was the only phenomenon surrounding Jesus' death it certainly could not have become the basis for Christian faith in the resurrection.

When Mary Magdalene discovered the tomb empty, she ran off to report what she thought to be foul play:

'The Lord has been taken from the tomb! We don't know where they have laid him' (John 20:1-9).

Even the Talmud (Jewish Scriptures) dismissed the empty tomb by explaining that Jesus' body was stolen. Strange, although the account of the empty tomb was recorded in all four gospels and was an early tradition; it was not included in St. Paul's earliest testimony to Jesus' resurrection. Christian faith in Jesus' victory over death is rooted in the appearance of the risen Lord to his followers. For those who believe in Jesus as risen by reason of his appearances to them, the puzzle of the empty tomb was resolved. That same Jesus who had walked and talked and had broken bread with them and had died and was buried was the same Christ who was alive and ever present to them. Paul stated clearly to his Corinthian church: 'If Christ is not raised from the dead, our preaching is empty, your faith is worthless and we are the most wretched of people'. (1 Cor. 15:19).

Perhaps the most significant statement in today's entire gospel is the evangelist's editorial comment 'that as yet they did not understand about Jesus' rising from the dead'. So far it had not become clear

that Jesus' rising was not simply the last act of one single life but the first movement of a new wonderful dimension in which all peoples would share.

To celebrate Easter is to remember that Jesus lives. We rejoice in the fact that because of him we also live today and for an eternity of tomorrows.

REFLECTION 2: CHRIST OUR LIGHT

The last lines from Mark's Easter account tells us that the disciples 'saw and believed. For they did not understand the Scriptures that he had to rise from the dead'. We can imagine what took place before their discovery. Jesus rose from death alone in the darkness of the tomb. He removed his own burial clothes and folded them. Jesus then took off his head covering, rolled it up and put it in a separate place. From inside the tomb he moved the heavy stone aside and stepped outside into the early morning darkness. Like the disciples we are challenged to believe that he rose from the dead. We have over 2,000 years to understand that the Easter Gospel invites us to step into the tomb and rediscover that Jesus' resurrection is a promise to us. We come to know that like him, we too, shall rise from the dead (cf. Mark 16: 1-7).

When asked to describe the mystery of Easter Carl Knudsen responded with the following story. 'Years ago an old lamplighter, engaged in putting out the street lights one by one, was met by a reporter who asked him if he ever grew weary of this work. After all it was a lonely job and the night was cold and damp. 'Never am I cheerless', said the old man. 'For there is always a light ahead of me to lead me on'. But what do you have to cheer you when you put out the last light?' asked the news writer. 'Then the dawn comes', said the lamplighter. One light after another did Jesus put out the light of popular acclaim, the lamp of patriotic approval, the lamp of ecclesiastical conformity – all for the sake of God's love, which burned in his heart and showed him the way. At last the light of his life was to flicker out on the hill called Calvary. What then? We hear Jesus' voice, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit'. And then came the dawn. All did not end on Calvary because the cross was a passage to eternal life. We celebrate today the Christ who lives and by whose rising a new day has dawned for all humankind. Our belonging to Jesus precludes any hopelessness or pessimism; any hiding or wandering aimlessly in the dark.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians challenges us to clean our house. Get rid, he commands, of the malice of wickedness so as to make room for sincerity and truth. Pope Francis in his 'Joy of the Gospel' tells us, 'Moved by Jesus' example, we are to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not with a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings joy and gives meaning to our lives'.

And so on this feast of life and light, we resolve to be the light that dispels another person's darkness and to share the life that Jesus has secured for each of us.