

March 31,2024 - Easter Sunday

“He Is Risen, He is Risen Indeed” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 20:1-18

The story of Easter told in the Gospel of John begins with a deep sense of loss. Mary Magdalene has gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body but there is no body in the tomb. The stone that covers the entrance of the tomb has been removed and the body of Jesus is not inside as it is supposed to be.

Poor Mary. Easter Sunday began for her with more grief. The death of the Lord was more than enough for her to bear, and now she has no idea where Jesus' body has been taken.

Ironically for Mary, the one who spoke Good News about finding the lost, this time cannot be found.

She did what any of us would do in those situations, that is, to ask for help. She ran back to Jerusalem to the house where the disciples had gathered 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 another disciple went to the tomb to verify what Mary had told them, they saw for themselves that all that was left inside the tomb were the linens that wrapped Jesus' body and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head.

Let's pause here for a moment. Up to that moment, the story of Easter for Mary and the disciples was one more story of a good friend, of a gifted young prophet, of a man of God like so many others who happened to have the bad luck to get in the way of the rulers, to get in the way of those who in their hands had the power to decide who lives and who dies. So, on Easter morning Mary and the disciples thought that the disappearing of Jesus' body was just another way of the Roman system and the powerful people to add insult to injury.

Who did roll the big stone that covered the tomb? Where were the Roman soldiers in charge of protecting the tomb? For the disciples and Mary, it had to be just another nasty, tasteless joke from those who condemned Jesus to make Jesus' followers to deepen their grief.

An empty tomb, with some linen wraps and a piece of cloth was the evidence to believe that Jesus' body had been moved out of the tomb and it was Mary's and the disciples' mission to find it.

The wrapping linen cloth left in the tomb was evidence of death not of life. There was no way for Mary, Peter and the other disciple that came to the tomb to think of the Lord's resurrection even though he had told them that he was going to die and three days later rise again.

How can we blame them for not remembering what the Lord said about his death and resurrection. In the middle of grief, it was hard to remember things or think with a clear mind, especially when the evidence of death was all around them: a dark tomb, burial linen cloth, oil and spices to anoint a dead body. It was a moment to deal with the reality of human destiny and nothing could change the fact that their dear Lord and friend was not going to be back and now not even his body could be found.

They were resigned to the reality in front of them. All that Mary could do was to remain standing outside the tomb crying. But that was not the end that God had prepared for Mary Magdalene, the disciples and all of us. The Lord Jesus was not dead. He had risen as he had told them, and it was in that moment when Mary was standing outside the tomb that the resurrected Jesus appeared to Mary. It was then when Mary's tears became tears of joy, and our faith was born.

So significant is this event that the whole of the Christian faith would fall if the resurrection of Jesus Christ were not true.

William Lane Craig suggests that "Without the belief in the resurrection, the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples and followers of Jesus would have remained crushed and defeated men and women. Even if they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, His crucifixion would have silenced any hope of Him being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad shameful end of His work. Therefore, it is crucial that the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are true and historically accurate."

And it is this faith, this belief in the resurrection that makes us capable to defeat the fear of death and welcome the death of fear.

It is normal to fear death, but for a Christian it is normal to give death to the fear of death because He lives and because He lives, we will live also.

I realize that the older we get the more losses we suffer and with each of those losses, part of us dies too. However, our faith in the Resurrected Jesus gives us the hope that all those losses, especially the ones of our loved ones, will be restored for us one day. This alone should change our perspective on how we live our lives.

John Ortberg put it this way, he said:

"I tend to divide my minutes into two categories: living and waiting to live. Most of my life is spent in transit: trying to get somewhere, waiting to begin, driving someplace, standing in line, waiting for a meeting to end, trying to get a task completed, worrying about something bad that might happen, or being angry about something that did happen. These are all moments when I am not likely to be fully present, not to be aware of the voice and purpose of God."

Worrying, being always stressed out trying to achieve something, getting a task completed or expecting something bad to happen, being angry, anxious about the day-to-day pressures of life, is not the way the Resurrected Lord wants us to live. Remember, He is the one who turns the tears of sorrow into tears of joy, He is the one who makes the impossible possible, He is the one who promised to be always with us to the end of times.

This is the reason we rejoice and celebrate Easter. This is what we call Good News. Let's take this Good News into every minute, every challenge, every hopeless and helpless moment with the spirit of Easter, with the faith in the Living God that tells us and shows us that even in death there is life. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**