

Easter, 2014

1. Today we commemorate a moment when history stood still:

a moment when light pierced the darkness,
a moment of contrasts & mixed imagery,
a moment of heroism and abandonment,
a moment of faith that focuses upon what is NOT seen rather than upon what is seen.

Normally, people celebrate what is present,
but today we celebrate what is not present:

after all, no body was found in the tomb,
there was no body to properly prepare for burial,
and no body over which to weep.

But as we celebrate the Resurrection, we must begin to realize that it is not, however, an isolated event...

it is part of a continuum of events that covered not only Jesus' earthly life,
but opens up doors to a life of immortality for each of us.

The belief in the Resurrection is not some appendage to the Christian faith;
belief in the Resurrection is the Christian faith.

The Resurrection, like all great things, begins in mystery and ends in a call for great courage.

And so if this holy day is going to have any personal meaning for us, it would be well for us to discover what exactly was it that transformed the Apostles, these mediocre, cowardly men into true disciples of Jesus Christ.

They were cowards, after all;
they ran away, deserted their friend, their teacher, their Lord.

Ran for their lives, ran and hid-- confused, ashamed, defeated--it was only Mary Magdalene, whose love for Jesus was greater than her fear, who dared to approach the tomb.

2. The great paradox of the Resurrection is that it is both spectacular and hidden.

The Resurrection doesn't stare us in the face like Jesus' suffering on the cross;
it is easy for us to picture the suffering & humiliation of Good Friday.
After all, we are accustomed to witnessing pain and misery every time we turn on the news

A plane gone missing in the Indian Ocean,
An overturned ferry in South Korea,
the killings in schools too many to mention.

There is something about suffering and the effects of sin that we understand, that has touched our lives. It may not be what we like, but it is what we know.

On the other hand, the Resurrection is not a familiar event in our experience.

3. The gruesome death of Jesus and the emptiness of the tomb where he was laid each tells part of the story, but this faith story is only an abstraction to us unless God is someone happening in our lives.

We are not here to simply commemorate empty space--commemoration implies that the drama is over.

We are here to proclaim that the events at the dawning of the 3rd day have affected our lives, perhaps even has turned us into disciples.

Jesus conquered death, not by suppressing its evil effects--after all, we still have disease, famine, violence and untold suffering throughout the world.

Jesus conquered death by knowing the whole picture and we conquer death by trusting in this larger picture, regardless of the disease, famine, violence and suffering we encounter because, and only because, this is the day when light overpowered darkness.

Once again, it was only when the Apostles acknowledged their weakness and accepted Jesus' forgiveness that were they able to deal with their fears; as we learn from early Church tradition, all were put to death for their beliefs, except for John: Peter was crucified with his head downward in Rome; Andrew crucified with arms and legs splayed in Hierapolis; James the Greater killed with a sword in Jerusalem; Philip was martyred in Hierapolis; Bartholomew flayed alive in Armenia; Thomas run through with a spear in India; James the Lesser thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the Temple and then beaten to death with a club; Matthew slain with a sword in Ethiopia; Simon the Zealot sawn in half in Persia; Jude Thaddeus beaten to death with a club in Persia; Matthias stoned and beheaded in Jerusalem and Paul beheaded in Rome.

All these men died testifying to the Resurrection even though they were at first surprised by, and disbelieving of, the event, but then they eventually came to accept Jesus' predictions of His passion, death and Resurrection; at that point, they knew what they knew and were not afraid to spread the Good News of Jesus, regardless of the consequences that they would be forced to face.

And finally, finally they came to understand that the gospels do not explain the Resurrection; the Resurrection explains the gospels.

4. We must come to understand and accept that belief in the Resurrection absolutely requires action on our part.

Sadly, we often tend to take comfort in straddling the fence and that allows us to believe and not believe at the same time—

if we're not really convinced about the Resurrection, it makes it easier to be indifferent, uncommitted, unexcited.

Certainly, it takes courage to come out of the shadows and move into the full glare of light;
it takes courage to remove any obstacle that tries to keep us in the shadows;
it takes courage to move away from a life built upon games, half-truths & illusions.

Part of us wants, desperately wants, to keep the stone in place;
but part of us wants, desperately wants, to remove the stone and look inside the tomb.

Certainly the world does not wish us to roll back the stone—ideologies, exploitation, potential betrayal:
fear of losing a certain life style all whisper: don't look for trouble;
life is hard enough as it is—you'll just be upset, confused.

But as Christians, we must roll back the stone and look inside.

To live in the sun or to live in the shadows—this is the choice of every Christian, every disciple.

5. And we need to understand that Easter is not simply the time when we commemorate empty space;
Easter is about Life!

Jesus left that tomb so as to be more readily part of our lives; to be someone happening in our lives.

Good Friday and Easter leads us to the realization: We belong to God and God belongs to us.

Sometimes we feel as though we don't want to be tied to a belief; we want to be free to be do our own thing,
but do we really want to be free, totally free of belonging; after all belonging to another is the richest gift any c
us can possess.

Who wishes to be free of the compulsions of love or the demands of justice?

Untouched by the birth of a child or the death of a parent;
Untouched by awe at the gathering storm or the stillness of dusk;
Unmoved by the terror of war or the prospect of peace.

To be without the strings of remembrance or the bonds of hope;
Without a desire to work, to help, to create;
Without expectations, passions or goals.

To be so totally free is, it seems to me, the shape of death.
Again, we belong to God and God belongs to us.
Let nothing blur this reality or change our focus.

After we accept the implications of Easter, we know that nothing any longer kills inevitability—not even if we
are betrayed by one of our closest friends....