

Easter Readings April 12, 2020

FIRST READING: Acts 10:34a, 37-43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

"The right hand of the LORD has struck with power; the right hand of the LORD is exalted. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1-4

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

The word of the Lord.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough? Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ,

has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 20:1-9

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Easter Reflection

Easter looks pretty empty this year. Social distancing does not allow for much festivity. Family gatherings will not happen for a while. This is true for our own families or the family of the Church. Emptiness is not one of my favorite feelings. Neither, I suspect, is it yours. Yet emptiness is the very theme of Easter.

Easter is all about emptiness. The gospel tells us that as Mary Magdalene, Peter and the Beloved Disciple approached Jesus' tomb, they found it empty. Jesus' dead body was not there. What they felt is not recorded in the gospel text. Mary made the discovery then ran away to seek Peter. When Peter and the Beloved Disciple arrived and witnessed the empty tomb, only the Beloved Disciple saw and believed. Jesus, the Christ, is risen! Truly he is risen! The Beloved Disciple found meaning and significance in the incongruity of the emptiness.

It is possible to know the Risen Jesus in the emptiness.

What does faith bring to our lives? It can provide us with a new way of seeing. We can see with eyes of faith. What does God see when God looks at each of us? God sees God's self. Each of us may be imperfect, sometimes weak and capable of sin. Is that what God sees? Certainly that is what we can see. However, each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Each of us is God's beloved son or daughter. God is love. Knowing this, we can see God in ourselves too.

Most of us have visited some shrine or holy place at least once in our lives. I've been to Holy Hill many times. People travel to Israel, Rome or Ireland. I don't know how many times I've been to Holy Name Cathedral. I graduated from Quigley, there, in 1971. If the tomb was occupied rather than empty, we would have another holy shrine; another place to visit. Because the tomb was empty, and Jesus wasn't there; He's everywhere. Jesus is especially within you and me. When we gather together, Jesus is in our midst. We become Jesus' Church and his body and blood. Since we do not gather together this year, this is emptiness too. I'm not saying

that one cannot find God in a holy place, but rather that God has made all places, all things and all people holy. There is no place, thing or person not holy. Finding God is not that difficult. God finds us. Most of us can find ourselves thinking God serendipitously. The thought of God can just pop into our minds.

I have to add, I have celebrated mass by my self for the last few weeks. It's not the same alone. Years ago, I learned how to speed read. The trick to it is simple. When reading, one does not vocalize the words in one's head. I remember going to see the Neil Simon movie, "Murder by Death" in the theater. In the beginning of the movie, some one is writing and invitation and signs and addresses the note, Lionel Twain at Two Two Twain. I read this and was surprised to hear the audience laughing. I had sped read the lines and didn't catch the puns. When I celebrate mass normally, with a congregation it lasts at least a half an hour during the week and at least fifty minutes for a funeral or on Sunday. By myself, it takes less than fifteen minutes. I don't preach to myself either. The other thing, I don't do are the dialogues. The Lord be with me and also with me just doesn't fly. It is in the absence of other people that reminds me of the connection with others.

Over the years I have picked up two sayings. The first is "Ecclesie supplet" Latin for the Church supplies. When something goes wrong, is not ready or with a mistake, don't sweat the small stuff. It really doesn't matter. God and the Church will provide for the lack. The other is "When you can't do the best thing, do the next best thing. These two phrases have given me a sense that imperfection is fine. God sees through the cracks and accepts and loves the flaws. If God can roll with my flow, perhaps I can roll with God's flow. God, though perfect, accepts our imperfection through the Cross and Empty Tomb. He is not there; he is always here.

Easter still looks empty this year; no masses and no trip to visit my family. I know, though, I am never alone; neither are you.

James D. Beath
April 11 & 12 2020

PS: I'm including Holy Saturdays readings too; all of them.