

## Easter Sunday

March 31, 2013

There was an Easter parade at the beginning. A meager one, to be sure, but nonetheless, a steady procession to the tomb – at least, in the Gospel of John. First Mary Magdalene, then the beloved disciple, then Simon – all marching off to the tomb. Only the Gospel of John recounts the first Easter this way. At first this account can seem disappointing – no angels in dazzling clothes, no resounding message that Jesus has risen, no appearance of the Lord, just this parade to the place of the dead.

But the parade that began then continues now, with the same recognizable route. The story of Easter, then and now, moves from darkness to light – from grieving to believing. Mary Magdalene is everyone who has experienced the darkness of death. Her darkness is more than the time of day, that period “while it is still dark.” It is the darkness of grief, pain, loss, and the finality of death. Notice that in this Gospel there is no mention of going to anoint Jesus or for any other reason. She goes simply to be there. She goes to the tomb simply because there is nowhere else she wants to be. She loved him, and she wants to be near what remains of him.

She speaks to us today about the darkness that surrounds our lives: the darkness of war, hatred, sickness, broken relationships, the darkness of pain, suffering, and death. Was her world as much in love with death as ours seems to be? There is the darkness of abortion, famine, drugs, gang wars, guns, any form of violence that takes the lives of the innocent. The deep darkness of the powers of evil and death is as real now as it was then.

The Easter story begins in darkness. But then comes something unexpected: the stone has been moved. That rolled-back stone is indeed the first clue that something has happened. Mary doesn’t even look into the tomb. She immediately runs to tell Simon and the one Jesus loved: “They have taken the Lord from the tomb.” And this report sends them racing to the tomb.

Some curious details follow. First it is noted that the beloved disciple gets there first but waits for Simon. Is it a subtle acknowledgment of Simon's restored place of honor in the community after his three-fold denial of Christ? Simon Peter is given entry to the tomb. To enter into the tomb is to enter into the dying and rising of Christ. Then there are those burial cloths. Why all the attention? Remember when Lazarus came out of the tomb, bound with these cloths clinging to him. He will need them when he dies once again. But Jesus is finished with death. He leaves it and all its trappings behind.

John's Gospel also gives importance to the act of seeing. We are told Peter *saw* the cloths. But only the beloved disciple sees and believes. Remember, the deepest kind of seeing in John's Gospel is to look with faith. Only he enters into the dying *and rising* of Christ. And that is the destiny of every beloved disciple. Finally the story concludes, "they did not yet understand the Scriptures that he had to rise from the dead." He had to rise because the God and Father of Jesus will not settle for death. God will not allow death to be victorious. God is not absent, even in the darkest of times. And God will not allow death to have the last word.

We have the next fifty days to ponder this mystery of the death and resurrection. We have fifty days to absorb the words from the Letter to the Colossians: "Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died [in the sacrament of baptism], and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory." This is the mystery in which our lives are to be lived.

Dear parishioners, my sisters and brothers, we are part of that ongoing Easter parade of people who know that death is not our destiny. Sometimes we are crawling, sometimes stumbling, sometimes running, but always we are moving toward the light of a new dawn. We move forward into the light of the risen Lord, singing the song of Easter: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Today is Easter. Amen! Alleluia!

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