

## **I EASTER 2015**

### **SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**

#### **FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**

***HYMN 100 1 ST JOHN 5.4 ST JOHN 20.19***



What do we mean when we say we are witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus? It means we believe Jesus really did die for our sins...he really rose from the dead on Easter morning. It means as Father Altberg said in his Easter sermon...we must not keep the Good News about the Resurrection of Jesus to ourselves. We must tell the story over and over again to all who will listen for the rest of our lives...until Jesus returns.

One witness who loved to tell the Easter story was Father Howard Chandler Robbins. He told the story through poetry...in 1929 he wrote a little book called *Vita Nova...New Life*...Easter is ultimately about LIGHT and NEW LIFE. His "Easter Carol for children" was the basis for today's Sermon Hymn..."The Sabbath day was by"...and what a story it tells.

In 1940, Canon Charles Winfred Douglas composed the music especially for this hymn. He was a gifted musician and loved to tell the story about Jesus through his music. His legacy are the over 30 hymns in the Hymnal 1940 of which he was the translator, composer or arranger. It has been said he began his career dedicated to the Praise of God...he ended his life with the praise of God on his mind and pen, and in his heart.

The Easter story is about the Resurrection of Jesus and our own. Jesus is the "first-fruits of those who sleep"...the hope we have for our own resurrections to everlasting life in heaven.

Jesus is the Prince of Life talked about in the hymn...he is THE LIGHT that overcomes the despair of sin and darkness of death and replaces them with forgiveness and light and life.

The characters in the Easter story and the hymn are more than just historical figures we read about in the Bible. Their Easter experience is our Easter experience. We share Mary Magdalene's sorrow when she saw Jesus die and get put in the grave. We share her confusion about what might happen next. We share her surprise at seeing it was no gardener but Jesus standing in front of her.

It's curious neither the Gospel nor the hymn make any mention of Thomas...the one who had his doubts...he heard the Good News about the Resurrection of Jesus...he didn't believe what he heard. He wanted proof. He got that...from Jesus himself...an invitation to put his hand in the wound in Jesus' side. We are called to believe without the doubts Thomas showed.

What the Gospels and the hymn teach us about Peter...the Rock...is that he too was very human. He saw Jesus get arrested. Afraid for his own life...he lied about ever knowing him. He got tested...and failed the test. Jesus forgave his failure because that is what Jesus does...he forgives. He understood Peter's fear. He had work for Peter...take care of his sheep...LOVE the Church...learn what it means to truly forgive.

Jesus came to his disciples when they were locked behind closed doors. He brought them glad surprise...his Resurrected Body. Jesus brings us glad surprise at every Mass...he makes himself available to us in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar...his own Flesh and Blood.

Mary Magdalene, Peter, even Thomas once he put aside his doubts, were first-hand witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus. They have a story to tell. Father Robbins and Canon Douglas are more recent witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus through their own unique gifts or poetry and music. They too have a story to tell. We need to listen and never stop telling the story.

The hymn closes by telling us how happy the disciples were to see their friend Jesus again. We call Jesus our Lord and King...and he is. He is also our friend because everything we experience in our lives he experienced in his own life...everything he did was for us and we love him with our whole being.

We are witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus because we believe. We share the same Faith of Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas and all of the Apostles, and of Father Robbins and Canon Douglas and all modern-day saints. We are called to share that Faith with others. What is that Faith...to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we have not yet seen!

