

EASTER 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
JOHN 20.1

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FRIDAY AFTERNOON WE FELT MUCH ALIGNMENT WITH MARY MAGDALENE AS WE QUIETLY FILED OUT OF THE CHURCH...PRIVATELY MEDITATING ON THE EVENTS BROUGHT INTO SHARP FOCUS BY OUR GOOD FRIDAY LITURGY. WE ARE UP EARLY THIS MORNING...emulating her need to arrive at the tomb of Jesus.

We entered a darkened church for the First Mass of Easter. Then, like Mary Magdalene, we experienced *LUMEN CHRISTI* – THE LIGHT OF CHRIST...we lighted a fire, the Paschal Candle, the rest of the candles...then the entire church. Symbolizing the return of Jesus from the darkness of Good Friday, OUR personal path from darkness is now illuminated.

We, of course, unlike Mary Magdalene, knew in advance, the events of today. To say she was ‘startled’ would be the understatement of history! Her transition from hopelessness to joyous disbelief is instantaneous...she cannot comprehend what she found...**JESUS...ALIVE!**

The Resurrection / Easter is the most perplexing of the events of Christianity...we can readily imagine the events leading **TO** Easter...we recreated them liturgically throughout Holy Week...by contrast, **NOTHING** we can experience or re-create matches Easter...that **IS** the very point. Imagine...what we want most and consider utterly impossible actually comes true!

We readily relate to and recount the specifics of Holy Week...people who were in Jerusalem saw them gave eyewitness records. While perhaps the topic of some conversation, the ‘Jesus matter’ was regarded as just another execution during Passover. The death of Jesus was, at most, a routine event for the citizens of Jerusalem...it would not have “made the Jerusalem Journal”...

The return of Jesus, **THE RESURRECTION**, eventually became quite another matter...!

For 20C analysis let us turn to that of another Mary...of whom, wrote contemporary commentator George Weigel...*Mary Flannery O’Connor, an exceptionally gifted Catholic writer, combined remarkable insight into the Creed with deep and unsentimental piety, unblinking realism about the Church vs the soul-withering acids of modern secularism. In her 39 years she created a treasure of commentary about our reality...O’Connor sensed ours is an age of cynicism – rejection of all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless. She understood the evangelical sterility of the smiley-face, cheap-grace, balloons-and-banners Catholicism that would become rampant shortly after her death.[1964]*

Flannery O’Connor wrote:

The Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection...are the true laws of human existence. Death, decay, destruction are the suspension of those laws...The Resurrection [Jesus fulfilling his promise to return] seems the high point in the law of nature. [God’s offer to redeem all in the world]

“Redemption is meaningless [however] unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live, and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause.”

A world indifferent to its need for redemption is not indifferent to the possibility of redemption; it’s a world hostile to that possibility. The Church meets this hostility by doubling down on its conviction that the truths it professes are really true, and in fact reveal the deepest truth of the human condition.

GO TELL THE OTHERS...said Jesus to Mary Magdalene. She did. So must we, living a life seeking redemption, and do likewise.

Two years ago George Weigel noted...

Our age habitually thinks low. Easter bids us to think high: very high. For Christ is risen, and so shall his faithful people be.

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