

I EASTER 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

HYMN 100 1ST JOHN 5.4 ST JOHN 20.19

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Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*...Latin for **God is Love**...that being a follower of Jesus “is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

Our encounter with the risen Jesus is not a one-day event...we experience it every day of our lives...and it is a story we must share with everyone who will listen. Saint John Paul II said, “Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves; they must proclaim him.”

The First Sunday after Easter is commonly called Low Sunday. Perhaps we feel a bit of a let down after all the excitement of Easter Day...but today is no less joyful. We are still in the Easter Season...and we will continue to sing Easter hymns for the next 40 days...until Ascension Day. Let's remember the quote from George Weigel in Father Altberg's Easter Sermon...*Easter bids us to think high: very high.*

The Sabbath Day Was By is a hymn that tells the story of those who were eyewitnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus and their reactions to the Empty Tomb are different. Mary Magdalene was frightened; Peter had to run and see for himself; Thomas didn't believe at all and wanted proof. How do we react to the Empty Tomb?

The source of the hymn is a little book of poetry...*Vita Nova...New Life*...written for children by Father Howard Chandler Robbins in 1929. Father Robbins later became Dean of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City. He was a gifted writer who used the medium of poetry to tell the story of the Resurrection and New Life in Jesus.

Canon Charles Winfred Douglas composed the music especially for this hymn in 1940. His legacy is the over 30 hymns in the *Hymnal 1940* he translated, composed or arranged. 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. He told the story through his special gift of music.

We can identify with the characters in the Easter story...they are more than just names we read about in Scripture and sing about in hymns. They were real people...like us...and their Easter experience speaks to 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 joy and happiness when Jesus calls her by name, “Mary”, and she realizes he is no gardener. Jesus also calls each of us by name to be witnesses for him.

Then there is Simon Peter. When things got really bad on Maundy Thursday he swore he didn't even know Jesus...and when the rooster crowed Jesus turned and looked at Peter...who remembered Jesus told him he would deny he knew him...and he ran away and cried. But Jesus is about forgiveness and he told Peter he had a mission for him...to take care of his sheep...to take care of people.

Thomas...he had his doubts. He didn't believe what he heard with his ears...he wanted to see with his own eyes and touch Jesus' wounds with his own hand. Jesus was willing to accommodate Thomas' request and told him to put his hand in his side...and then to stop being a doubter...and believe.

Mary Magdalene, Peter, even Thomas once he put aside his doubts, were first-hand witnesses to the Resurrection...and they experienced incomparable joy at seeing their friend Jesus once more. We experience the same incomparable joy by living the Resurrection of Jesus in our hearts and minds every day of our lives...and by sharing our joy with others.

We see the Empty Tomb. It has changed our lives and we believe in the Resurrection and it will continue to change and renew our lives everyday. The “decisive direction” Pope Benedict XVI wrote about is knowing and loving Jesus and knowing he loves us...and then letting his love transform us from within.

And the love of Jesus...we cannot keep it for our selves...we must proclaim it...we must proclaim him. He is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

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