

I EASTER 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

HYMN 100 1 ST. JOHN 5.4 ST. JOHN 20.19

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Let's return to the first Easter morning and Mary Magdalene's frantic race to find Jesus' grave. There are several comments Father Altberg made in his Easter sermon, which I would like to augment.

Mary went to finish what there was no time to do on Good Friday in the rush to get Jesus buried...give him a proper burial. When she gets to the cemetery, she is confronted with the empty tomb...and someone she thinks is the gardener. Distracted, she asks, "Where have you taken him"?

It is no gardener standing at the empty tomb...it is the risen Jesus...who calls her by name..."Mary". And she knew it was Jesus. "There is no more reason to cry, Mary, I am here." The shepherd calls his sheep by name...and they know him and respond.

Fast-forwarding to today's Gospel we find the disciples are hiding behind a closed and locked door...horrified by what happened on Good Friday...afraid they might be next. Suddenly Jesus appears to them...in an unexpected and surprising way.

Jesus didn't knock on the door and announce himself. The disciples didn't unlock the door and let him in. His resurrected body had properties we don't understand. He "appeared" to them and has to tell them not to be afraid. We can only imagine what our own resurrected bodies will be like.

What about our friend Peter...the Rock...the one who said he would never leave Jesus' side? When things got really bad...he did exactly that. He said he didn't even know the Prince of Life. And Jesus looked at him...and Peter ran off and cried.

Peter was a very real human being like us...he let fear get ahold of him. Jesus understood fear...we know that from his urgent plea to God on Maundy Thursday. But Jesus wasn't out to punish Peter for his shortcomings...he used them to build his character...because he had work for him. Jesus told Peter to be a shepherd to the sheep he would be sending his way.

We have somewhat of an advantage over the disciples hiding behind closed and locked doors...we know how the Easter Story turns out. However, Easter remains a perplexing event for Christians. It is the one event we cannot fully experience or recreate...but it is the event we can look forward to with hope and expectation will happen to us...some day!

It has been 2000 years since the first Easter morning. The disciples were happy to see Jesus again. We share in their joy and happiness as we wait with hope and expectation for that which we have not yet experienced...a personal appearance by Jesus and our own resurrections to eternal life.

The Easter story is about God's love for us...light, life, hope, and resurrection. The Easter Story does not end on Easter Monday or Easter Tuesday or the Sunday after Easter. Every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection. Stores have already started after-Easter sales or put away Easter decorations to be dusted off again next year. Let's remember what was said last week...we never close!

Easter compels us to tell the Resurrection story over and over again. The hymn *The Sabbath Day Was By* was written in 1929 by Father Howard Chandler Robbins, as *An Easter Carol for children* as part of a collection of poems. Canon Charles Winfred Douglas composed the music especially for this hymn in 1940.

In the five short verses of the hymn we get the entire Easter morning story. Jesus, the Prince of Life, has come back, just like he said he would. Mary Magdalene's confusion...and ours is set aside. Peter's shortcomings are cancelled...so are ours. Jesus appeared to the disciples then...he is certain to appear to us some day...it is his promise.

They were happy to see their friend again. We are happy and believe...because of the record of those who witnessed Jesus' Resurrection first-hand...and did not keep it to themselves. It is THE event we cannot keep to ourselves either. People need to hear...

...Christ has died...Christ is risen...Christ will come again!

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