

EASTER 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

JOHN 20.1-10



SHE WAS THE “LAST AT THE CROSS AND FIRST AT THE GRAVE”...WHAT SHE FOUND WHEN SHE GOT TO THE CEMETERY...WAS AN EMPTY GRAVE.

Good Friday left us at the foot of the cross with Mary Magdalene...with much to think about what just happened. The Good Friday Liturgy is gripping in the way it tells the story of Jesus’ journey to the cross. But the story doesn’t end with his death and burial...there is Good News yet to come.

At the early First Mass of Easter...we entered the church...still dark from Good Friday. We sang *Lumen Christi*...the *Light of Christ*...the Paschal Candle was lighted...symbolizing Jesus’ return from death...the sadness of Good Friday is now replaced by joy...Easter has arrived!

Mary Magdalene plays an important role in the life of Jesus. She was part of a group of women who followed Jesus. She was the first to arrive at Jesus’ grave and had come to anoint his dead body...something that couldn’t be done on Good Friday in the rush to get him buried before the Sabbath.

We can imagine Mary’s reaction when she finds the grave empty...the body of Jesus gone. She reached the same conclusion we would have reached had we been there with her...and in a sense...we are through today’s Mass. She cried aloud, “They have stolen his body”. She runs back to Peter and John and the others and reports what she has seen.

We have a distinct advantage over Mary...we know how the story turns out. But we can understand what must have been going through her mind. She must have been confused, bewildered, shocked, frightened, brokenhearted, overwhelmed by grief.

If we piece together the various Gospel accounts of the resurrection and the role Mary Magdalene played in spreading the Good News...JESUS IS ALIVE AGAIN...we begin to understand why Jesus coming back from the dead is perplexing...even though we just confessed our belief in the resurrection when we recited the Nicene Creed.

The events of Holy Week are recreated liturgically in Saint Joseph Parish every year...just as Catholic Christians have done for centuries. We get Palm Sunday...after all doesn’t everybody like a parade. We get that Jesus told us to love each other as much as he loves us. We get the crucifixion...death is a reality...we have friends and family who have died. Jesus coming back from the dead leaves us experiencing the same emotions Mary Magdalene experienced...SURPRISE!

Where were Peter and John and the others while Mary was trying to fathom the meaning of the empty grave? She wanted to know who stole Jesus’ body. Peter and John and the others were hiding. When they finally got to the grave they saw what Mary had seen...an empty grave. They were not expecting to find Jesus alive...they didn’t get the Resurrection.

When Jesus first appears to Mary after the resurrection she thinks he is the gardener. She asks, “Where have you taken him”? In her grief she doesn’t recognize him. And Jesus responds, “Mary”. She now recognizes Jesus. “See, I told you I would be back. I love you and the others still. Go tell them I’m back”.

The others were happy to see Jesus alive again. At first, Thomas wasn’t with them and wouldn’t believe the others when they told him Jesus was alive. “I won’t believe unless I put my hands in his wounds”, said Thomas. Thomas wasn’t the world’s first skeptic...but he had his doubts...until Jesus appeared to him too.

We live in an age of skepticism...people believe only what they can see and handle...if it isn’t tactile...it doesn’t exist or isn’t true. We are called to BELIEVE in the resurrection of Jesus...and not because of the empty grave. The empty grave is circumstantial evidence of the resurrection of Jesus at best. We believe because of the eyewitness testimonies of Mary Magdalene and the others who saw him for themselves.

Jesus told Mary to go tell the others...and the others went out and told others. We are to do the same...tell others! What do we say?

We shout...*The Lord is risen!* And one day we too will experience the same resurrection and be alive with Jesus...forever and ever! HAPPY EASTER! ALLELUIA! THE LORD IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

