

I EASTER 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. JOHN 20.19-23 HYMN #100 (H1940)

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JOHN WAS NEXT TO GET TO THE CEMETERY...THEN PETER...THEY SAW THE EMPTY GRAVE AND BELIEVED WHAT MARY HAD TOLD THEM...THEN THEY WENT HOME.

Let's go back to where we left off last week...the first Easter morning...just before sunrise.

Mary Magdalene was left alone at the cemetery by the empty grave...crying. Certain Jesus' body has been stolen...she asked someone she thinks is the gardener for help. It's only when Jesus called her by name...she recognized it was no gardener...it was Jesus.

In the Parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus identifies himself as the real Good Shepherd who watches over his sheep. He calls them by name and they come to him because they know his voice. Like Mary Magdalene...Jesus knows each of us by name...we are his sheep.

Mary was so happy to see Jesus again she grabbed him by his feet and wouldn't let go. Jesus told her she didn't need to do that...he wasn't going away back to heaven yet. He would be around for a while longer.

Following Jesus' instructions...Mary went and told Peter and John she had seen him. They had already been to the cemetery..."and they saw and believed". What they believed was the grave was empty...they hadn't seen the risen Jesus yet...nor were they expecting to see him again.

That brings us to today's Gospel. It's late Sunday evening and the disciples have locked themselves in a room. Three days earlier they saw Jesus executed...they were afraid they were next. Jesus appears to them...and he doesn't knock on the door...he walks through it! This is not the ordinary way people enter a room. The first thing Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. You're not seeing things. I'm no ghost. It's me." They were glad to see him.

Jesus has to reassure his disciples and tells them again there is no need for them to be afraid. He had a mission from God...and now

he has a mission for them...he was sending them out...they were now Apostles...from the Greek word *Apostoloi*...the sent out ones.

Before they could be sent out to do God's work...the Apostles needed some help. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive peoples' sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." These are the very same words the bishop says as he lays his hands on a man and ordains him a priest.

Bishop McClean shared his power and authority to forgive sins with me when he ordained me a priest...as the Ember Day Collect states..."God has committed to the hands of men the ministry of reconciliation." The Church is about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus had to make certain what the disciples experienced first-hand at the resurrection was passed on into the future. When he breathed the Holy Spirit...the Breath of God...on the eleven remaining Apostles...he made them the Church's first bishops. They went out and made more bishops...like Matthias...who replaced Judas Iscariot.

There has been an unbroken line of Apostolic Succession of bishops since then whose primary job has been to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus...by telling the story to all who are eager to hear. Bishop McClean and other bishops become witnesses to the resurrection themselves...and priests are witnesses too through administering the Sacraments and teaching.

The Apostles believed Jesus rose from the dead because they saw him in his Resurrected body walk through a closed and locked door and heard his reassuring voice calling them by name. They were happy to see him, once more, before he went back to heaven.

And we are happy too, even though we have not yet seen Jesus in his Resurrected body. We love him and adore him because we are his sheep and he is the Good Shepherd...calling us by name.

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