

I EASTER 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

HYMN 100 1 ST JOHN 5.4 ST JOHN 20.19



It's the first Easter morning...the hymn we just sang tells us...the darkness of night has given way to the light of day...it's the first day of the week...Jesus the Prince of life is near.

Father Howard Chandler Robbins wrote a book of poems for children in 1929 called *Vita Nova...New Life*. His "Easter Carol for children" is the basis for today's Sermon Hymn..."The Sabbath day was by". It is one of my favorite hymns in the simple way it tells the Easter story.

The music for the hymn was composed in 1940 by Canon Charles Winfred Douglas. Canon Douglas' legacy for us are the over 30 hymns in the *Hymnal 1940* of which he was the translator, composer or arranger. 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.

The Easter story begins with the encounter Mary Magdalene has with Jesus...whom she thinks is the gardener. "Stop crying", Jesus tells her, "I'm not the gardener...it's your friend Jesus...there's no more need to be sad...I'm bringing you glad surprise."

Then there's Simon Peter. Poor Peter! His name...*Peter...Petros* in Latin...means *rock*. More like rocky. When times got tough on Maundy Thursday...Peter said he didn't even know Jesus and ran away. But...Jesus forgave his moment of weakness and tells him he has work for him...he is being sent out to take care of God's people...the sheep.

Today's Gospel and the hymn cut the Easter story short...we need the part about Thomas...he had his doubts about the Resurrection of Jesus. "Put your hand in my side", Jesus tells Thomas, "And set aside all your doubts...it really is me!" All Thomas can say...all we can say...is "My Lord and My God!"

We believe in the Resurrection of Jesus because of the eyewitness testimony of Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas and the other Apostles. What makes them credible is they were ordinary people called to live extraordinary lives of service to God and his Church.

Let's think about it...Peter was an uneducated fisherman prone to impulsive actions...Mary Magdalene was plagued by demons and Jesus healed her and she becomes Jesus' Public Relations Officer after the resurrection...and doubting Thomas overcame his doubts and travelled to India and preached the Gospel there.

They were ordinary people like us. That makes the Easter story all the more compelling. Their Easter experience was of the first kind. Our Easter experience is through their witness and the poems and hymns of people like Father Robbins and Canon Douglas. Our Easter experience is also through our witness to each other.

The hymn closes by telling us Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas and the others were *blest* at seeing their Friend Jesus once more. *Blest* means *happy*. They were happy when Jesus appeared to them...somehow able to walk through a locked door...and told them to not be afraid...it was he, their friend, Jesus.

Jesus is the Prince of Life...he is THE LIGHT that overcomes the despair of sin and darkness of death and replaces it with forgiveness and light and life. It's the return of that light we celebrate on Easter morning and will continue to celebrate until Pentecost. The Apostles would have to wait until Pentecost before they would fully understand the meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus...and what it means for them, for us, and for the world.

Like Mary Magdalene, Peter and Thomas, we are witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus because we believe. We share the same Faith of Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas and all of the Apostles, and of Father Robbins and Canon Douglas and all of the Saints of God living and dead.

The hymn tells us our happiness is experienced in the faith that sustains us and in what the writer of Hebrews says is the expectation we have of the things we hope for...the certainty of the things we have not yet seen!

Until that day...we love our Friend Jesus and praise him and celebrate the glad surprise of his return. Easter is not over...He is Risen! Alleluia!

