

I Easter 2024
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
*St. John 20.19-23 and
Hymn #100 in the Hymnal 1940*



...The Sabbath Day was by. The Light was in the sky. When on the first day of the week, the Prince of Life drew nigh.

It's now the evening of the first Easter Day. The disciples have learned from Mary Magdalene she found the grave where Jesus had been placed empty. Confused and worried, the disciples went to their respective homes.

Saint John records Mary Magdalene stayed behind in the cemetery. Overwhelmed by grief she looks at the empty grave and cries. Two angels appear and ask her why she is crying. She replies they have taken away her Lord and she doesn't know where they have put him. Then she hears a voice behind her; she thinks it's the gardener. He calls her by name, "Mary".

...Sad Mary, dry thine eyes, and cease thy woeful cries. It is no gard'ner, but thy Lord, who brings thee glad surprise.

What a surprise it was! Jesus came back from the dead just like he promised he would. Mary ran off to tell the others. They had returned to the Upper Room and locked the doors. They were in fear for their lives. But Jesus would soon put their fears to rest.

...Simon, thy Lord knows all; He doth forgive thy fall. And send thee forth to feed the sheep that heed the Shepherd's call.

Simon Peter seems like the least likely candidate to be a leader in the Early Church. He was Andrew's brother and a fisherman. He didn't possess a Doctorate in Theology. He was, by all accounts, an average guy. That's what makes him so believable. When Jesus was arrested, Peter told the police he didn't even know Jesus. And Jesus turned and looked at him. Jesus forgave Peter just as he forgives us...we just have to answer his call.

...So did the Lord draw near, to his disciples dear. When he came back from death and hell, and to them did appear.

Jesus cherished and loved his disciples. He had a surprise for them too. He appeared to them when they were behind locked doors...his Resurrection body changed...he did not need to knock and have them open the door. His sudden miraculous appearance startles them. Jesus calms them down by saying, "Peace be with you." They were so happy to see him. He still had the wounds from Good Friday. He says to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you."

Then he breathed on them God's Holy Spirit...God's breath...and said something remarkable, "If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. These are the same words the bishop says at the point he ordains a man to the priesthood. The priest's authority to forgive sins does not come from himself. It comes from Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a forgiveness that reaches out...it glorifies God...not the priest.

...Blest were the eyes of yore; that saw their friend once more. And blessed are we, who have not seen, but love him and adore.

John tells us Thomas was not present when Jesus came to the other disciples. When they told Thomas the good news...he did not believe them. He wanted proof Jesus came back. He wanted to touch Jesus' wounds. We call a skeptic who refuses to believe something is true without direct personal experience a "doubting Thomas". But Thomas' own words tell us he didn't just doubt the Resurrection of Jesus...he rejected it completely until he had the physical proof.

But Jesus had plans for Thomas. One week later Jesus again comes to the disciples and this time Thomas is with them. Jesus gave him the proof he wanted...he told Thomas to touch the wound in his side and to stop doubting and believe. Thomas called him "My Lord and my God!" Thomas' confession of faith is a dramatic reversal of his doubts about the Resurrection of Jesus.

In the Letter to the Hebrews we read, "To have faith is to be sure of the things hoped for, to be certain of the things we cannot see." The disciples saw Jesus after his Resurrection and they believed. We are happy and believe even though we have not yet seen him...but we love him and adore!

