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St. Thomas More Church, NYC
April 4, 2021 Streaming Mass
Solemnity of Easter 2021 John 20:1-9

As we read the Easter story once again, it is not the joyous account we might expect, but rather a tale of confusion and panic. Mary of Magdala, one of the few disciples of Jesus who had remained with Him to the bitter end, came to the tomb to grieve for Him who was both their Teacher and Friend. She finds the stone at its entrance somehow already removed--the stone that represented the finality of death, human powerlessness in the face of such loss. Mary had gone expecting to find a corpse, to perform the usual ministrations of burial that she had been prevented from performing for Jesus because of the approach of the Sabbath. Instead of a corpse, she finds the tomb empty. She flees in panic to report what she had seen, or rather had not seen, and returns with Peter and John. When Peter and John arrive, they also find the tomb empty, but the Gospel writer adds these details, "[They] saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered [Jesus'] head, not with the burial clothes, but rolled up in a separate place." If it had been some grave robbers who had stolen Jesus' body, which was not uncommon in those days---would the robbers have been so meticulous in folding His burial garments?

Curiously the reaction of Mary is not one of joy, but rather confusion, fear, terror. Her life, devastated just a few days earlier by the death of her beloved Teacher, is again thrown into turmoil. All the stories she and the other disciples had been accustomed to tell themselves and to tell each other about how the world works---these stories didn't make sense anymore. Something radically new, something very strange was occurring, and they did not yet have words to express it.

Out of the confusion, the terror, the panic of Easter morning is born a radical sense of hope--which is more than just some cheery optimism, more than the wish that somehow things will work out in the end. Hope is the conviction that God's judgment of forgiveness and reconciliation, revealed in raising Jesus from the dead, will in time be accepted by humanity as the only pattern for living that makes any sense. As Easter Christians we look forward to the destiny of the human race that St. Paul points out for us---that final day of triumph when all things shall be reconciled in Christ (Col 1:20).

So, what do we do in the meanwhile? "We live in hope, and in patient endurance," as St. Paul tells us (Romans 5:3-5). Because we follow Him who died a victim on the cross, a victim of all those false and violent strategies that brought about His death, executed by those who believed they were doing God's work in killing Him;

because we follow the One who stands in solidarity with all those who continue to be victimized by the sham values of our society; we rejoice in the outpouring of God's own Holy Spirit, empowering us to live in the manner of His Son, so that we can now stand in support and solidarity with the victims of our day, with all those who are subject to abuse, discrimination, and persecution in any form. We try, however feebly, to live the truth that can set ourselves, and others free.

The Resurrection is not simply Jesus coming back to life. It is a movement upward and forward into a new quality of life, a new level of existence that is breaking through. The future that God offers us is breaking through. We catch a glimpse of the ultimate triumph of good over evil, of love over hate, of life over death. The Resurrection is God vindicating the wisdom, the compassion, the welcoming extended to all and every, regardless of their background that Jesus showed in His ministry. That is the "truth that will make us free." That is the promise and the hope of Easter. Now it is given to us to live out that message.