Easter Sunday
Cycle B, 4.1.18
Acts 10:34, 37-43/
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8/John 20:1-9

WINNING ISN’T EVERYTHING...
BUT LIFE WON IN CHRIST IS

We’re very grateful to the administration of Stanley Middle School for allowing us to use their space for two of our Easter liturgies this morning. While we’re under construction for our new Community Center, we’ve had to re-arrange a lot of programs and events. This rearrangement has proven to be a positive experience with ample space for parking and enough room for all of us to be together in one room for this significant Holy Day celebration. Many of our parish children attend Lafayette Elementary and Stanley Middle School and I know that many parents from our parish are deeply involved in our local public schools, serving on various boards and committees, supporting the athletic, musical and educational programs. I hope this celebration in “your space” is a way of blessing your efforts and the fine educational work of our local civic community.

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It’s good to be together for this Easter Festival, to come to the touchstone of our faith and to renew our commitment to live the gospel. How many of you have ever entered a running race? There are so many in the Bay area – Bay to Breakers, the Lafayette Run for the Reservoir, CYO track and field events. When I was living in Colorado some thirty years ago, much younger and spry and naïve, some friends talked me into running a half-Marathon in the mountain towns outside Denver, from Georgetown to Idaho Springs. With hundreds of other runners we parked our car and walked toward the starting line.

The air was crisp, the mountain scenery was glorious and spirits were high with anticipation. We overheard a runner nearby, who already started his warm-up jog, say to his partner: “I dunno if I’m gonna make it to the end; I may need a priest halfway through this race.” My friends just looked at one another and smiled. Little did I realize that I would be the one who nearly needed a priest at mile twelve when I thought my last breath was just that. I did cross the finish line and victoriously took my bagel, yogurt and T-shirt, informing my friends that some experiences should be a once-in-a-lifetime memory. The following year, I weakened... and we did it again.

I hope you noticed the foot race that took place in the resurrection gospel we just heard. Mary came to the tomb where Jesus was buried and found it empty. In a panic, she ran to Simon Peter. Never one to listen to women or even at times to Jesus, Peter and the other disciple have a foot race to the tomb to see for themselves. The other disciple, John, ran faster than Peter
and got to the tomb first. He won the race. But, did you notice? He didn’t go in first; he stepped aside and let Peter be the first to go in.

That little, almost insignificant detail of this touching gospel story, says something very important about what it means to be a Christian, to be a follower of the Risen Lord. So many times in life, being first means being the best: winning a gold medal at the Olympics, winning the blue ribbon in the 4-H competition, getting the top marks and earning the best scholarship. While silver medal holders should feel proud, few of us ever want to finish a race or anything else in second place. We want to be number one. But the Easter Gospel teaches us another way to be. Even though the disciple John reached the tomb first, he slowed down and gave Peter the honor of being the first to enter. Like the other disciple, there are times when we realize that winning isn’t everything. Our own individual prayer or accomplishments are less important than building up others. We need to look out for one another. We are all members of the Body of Christ and we’re called to love and respect each member of Christ’s Body.

That was perhaps the most important lesson Jesus taught his disciples and us. At the last supper, on the night before he died, Jesus got down on his hands and knees and washed the feet of his disciples – a humble act that only a servant would do. Afterwards he said to his friends: “Do you realize what I just did for you? You call me “Master” and “Teacher” — and you’re right; that’s who I am. But if I, your Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you have to do the same for one another. I gave you an example, now follow it.” Jesus calls us to bend low in serving one another.

In one of his delightful books of children’s Fables, author Arnold Lobel tells the tale of “King Lion and The Beetle.” King Lion looked in the mirror admiringly: “What a beautiful and noble creature I am -- every inch a king!” So he donned his robes of state and his largest jeweled crown, all his gold and silver medals and set out to impress his subjects. As he walked down the roads of his kingdom, everyone who saw him bowed to the ground. King Lion roared with delight:
“Yes, yes. I deserve this respect from my people, for truly I am every inch a king!”

There was a tiny Beetle standing near the road. When the King saw him he cried: “Beetle, I command you to bow low before me!” “Your Royal Majesty,” said the Beetle, “I know that I’m small, but if you look at me closely, you’ll see that I am making a bow.” The King leaned over. “Beetle,” he said, “you are so hard to see down there. I’m still not sure that you are bowing.” “Your Majesty,” said the Beetle, “please look more closely. I assure you that I am indeed bowing.” The King leaned a little farther.

Now the robes of state, the large jeweled crown, and all of the gold and silver medals had made King Lion very top-heavy. Suddenly he lost his balance and fell on his head. With a great roar, he rolled into a ditch at the side of the road. The frightened little Beetle scurried away (no doubt, with a little smirk on his face). From head to foot, every inch of King Lion was covered with wet mud.

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Jesus, the Risen Lord, is our King, but he carries himself with gentleness and humility. We follow his law, but it’s the law of love. We belong to his Kingdom, but it’s a Kingdom without borders and its citizens are all who put their faith and trust in God. We give him our allegiance, but we give it freely because we receive so much more in return. He gives us strength and power, but as means of forgiveness and peace. How can you and I keep in our hearts that attitude of humble reverence toward one another and generous service to our world?

You’re doing it right now, through hearing God’s Word in the scriptures, by becoming one with Christ in the Eucharist we’ll share, by joining together in this Mass that joins us to one another and to the Church. So let the grace of Easter transform your hearts and your homes. In a world of violence and prejudice, of indifference and intolerance, let your faith show others that the humble path of Jesus is the winning road to travel. Christ has won the race… now we can share in his victory. Christ is risen from the tomb… now we can live a new life in Him.

John Kasper, OSFS