April 12, 2020: Easter Sunday

Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen! It is an amazing moment when you enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. As you enter the church, you see stairs on your right that go up to Golgotha where Christ was crucified. You are able to place your hand into the hole where the cross of Christ was placed. You might ask, how do they know that this is the exact location? Well, right below the Chapel of Crucifixion is another chapel, and there you can see a crack in the rock that could only have been made by an earthquake—just like the one described in the Gospels. As you move further through the church, you come to an ornate structure that was not quite so ornate at the time of Christ. It would have been part of a hill, having a grave hewed into the rock. It is now essentially a chapel that is in the middle of the church.

Entering into the grave of Christ I cannot help feeling the reality of the meaning of the empty tomb. The power of God’s love is so transformative that it changes our rejection of Christ at Golgotha into the reality of the empty tomb. We come to this place most likely looking for something. And, like the disciples of old, what we discover is an empty tomb. In one sense there is nothing there, and yet, all the answers we are looking for can be found in that place.

The tomb is not simply about the fact that Christ was laid in that place. It is not simply about what happened when the women went to prepare his body and discovered that it was no longer there. It is not simply about the story that we tell each year, to remind ourselves that the tomb was found empty and the disciples were quite confused by this fact. They wondered who had taken him. They wondered where else He had been laid. They could not comprehend at first the reality of the empty tomb. They knew as surely as we do that when a person dies, that is it—they are dead.

But then the stories started coming out. Mary Magdalen had seen him. The women had encountered angels who spoke about his rising from the dead, asking them why they were looking for the living among the dead. The apostles began to have their own experiences of the risen Christ, and at first they did not understand what it all meant. It would take multiple moments before they realized that all Christ had spoken about was not just metaphor, but reality.

The empty tomb is a moment for us to encounter Christ. The reality is that we all build tombs for ourselves. We do it when we marginalize others, when we grow in pride, when we see the world as we believe it should be, when we choose not to love as Christ loves, and so forth. With each sin, each attitude, and each desire fulfilled that is not about God, we deepen and widen our tomb. And the reality is that we can get more and more comfortable in it. The tomb we create becomes our norm of life and our reality, and yet Christ shows us the way out.

He calls to us. He beckons us out of the tomb as He did Lazarus, to encounter the power of God’s transformative love. His disciples betrayed, rejected, denied, and abandoned Him. And this should have been the moment for God to say, “I have had enough of you—I am moving on.” Rather, He said, “Now you will truly understand my love. I want you to truly live. And I will show you the way.” Jesus died to himself and then rose from the dead—not in a figurative way but in reality. And it did not actually begin at the cross. It began at the Incarnation when Christ become one with us by uniting his divinity with our humanity.

    Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God,
    did not regard equality with God—
something to be grasped.
Rather, He emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
He humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Christ showed us the way to eternal life. He showed us the way of the empty tomb. What Christ has done we also must do. We must empty ourselves of all that is not of Jesus. We must seek that life centered in the will of the Father. We must recognize that our life in Christ is one of continual conversion. It is a life of daily dying to self in order to raise to new life in Christ. This is the way of the empty tomb. The empty tomb shows us the way to true life, true joy, true peace, true love.

He is truly risen! May we do the same!

Easter Blessings to all of you at this very difficult time.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian