

Thursday of the Second week of Easter; reflections

My dear mother--- God rest her soul—was only seven years old when her only sibling, a younger brother, died at the age of three. The death of her brother was a hard pill to swallow for a young girl. Her brother simply disappeared after his premature death. In those days, the mid 1930's, young children did not participate in the process of grieving. They were usually not allowed to attend wakes or funeral services. Hoping to make sense of her loss, she asked her father, my grandfather, where her brother had gone. He simply could not ignore her question. How did he respond? My grandfather then took to her to where he was buried, St. Agnes cemetery in Menands.

The word 'cemetery' comes from a Greek word, meaning "a place of sleep" It is "a resting place" for all our deceased loved ones. In response to my mother's question, my grandfather said, "Here your brother sleeps. But one day, a day known only to God, your brother will rise from sleep, and we will eventually be reunited with him in heaven".

In the bible, death is often described as a long sleep. In death, Our Lord Jesus Christ fell asleep on Good Friday, only to be raised up by the Eternal Father on the third day.

In his first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, St. Paul writes, "We want you to be quite certain brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. I Thes.4:13)

In John's account of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus, upon learning of his dear friend's death, said, "Our friend Lazarus is at rest. I am going to wake him" (Jn. 11:11)

The best news the world has ever had came from a cemetery near Jerusalem. The tomb of Jesus of Nazareth was empty. His tomb is famous not because of what is inside, but because it is empty.

In the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we read: "It was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus, whom you executed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

Jesus no longer sleeps in death, but has been raised by his heavenly Father.

Perhaps some of you may remember the enchanting fairy tale, "Sleeping Beauty". If so, you are certain to recall and appreciate one of the key moments of the story; a handsome prince restores to life a princess in a deep slumber, which represents death. The story reminds us of the mystery of Easter Sunday, the day of Our Lord's Resurrection from the dead.

If you should ever visit a loved one at one of our local cemeteries, please be aware that they are only sleeping. They are destined to rise from sleep. And that is true of each one of us when we fall asleep in death.

