

Fr. Curtis Miller

April 12, 2020

Homily for Easter Sunday

As you probably know, I joined the priests at the parish in St. Johnsbury for the three days of the Paschal Triduum liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil last night. It was nice to be able to join other people for Mass, though I know that sadly you were not able to do the same. I hope that you have still been able to keep a spirit of prayer during these holy days. Know that I kept you all in my prayers especially during these past few days. At least we're able to gather in prayer via the internet on this joyful Easter day.

In the evening after the end of the Mass on Holy Thursday, it's customary to follow a procession of the Eucharist and to stay in that place for a period of prayer. This commemorates Jesus leaving the upper room where He had just shared the Last Supper with His disciples. The Gospels tell us that they went to the garden of Gethsemane while singing a hymn, and Jesus went off by Himself to pray. Jesus prayed in agony, knowing that at any moment Judas, His betrayer, would arrive with the soldiers to arrest Him. Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." Time and time again, though, Jesus returned to find His disciples asleep. He asked them, "Could you not stay with Me one hour to pray?" So it is customary to remain in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist for an hour of prayer following the Holy Thursday Mass.

While I was praying in the church that night, I heard a few people outside, praying quietly. I went out and saw that it was a woman I knew from my time there, kneeling on the church steps in the rain, praying, with a little candle lit in vigil. I told them that they could come inside out of the rain to pray, but the mother said that because she works as a nurse, she didn't want to risk spreading any illness, so they would stay praying outside. And so they did, quietly keeping vigil with Jesus for the hour.

There's someone who recognizes Jesus, both in the Eucharist and in the sick people for whom she cares. There's someone who knows what the paschal mystery is all about. Even in spite of discomfort, even when it called for sacrifice, she wanted to be close to Jesus and to serve Him.

In fact, that is precisely what Jesus did for us during that first Holy Week. He endured discomfort and self-sacrifice so that He could be close to us and serve us. Jesus lay down His life for us on the cross on Good Friday, and then rose again from the dead on Easter. What a glorious mystery! That is what Easter is all about. The journey through Holy Week is hard, but there is no greater glory than Jesus' resurrection on Easter.

Our journey through the current crisis of this pandemic is hard, too, but our hope is the same: Jesus' resurrection on Easter. This does not mean, however, that we can just

pretend away all the suffering that so many of us are going through right now. Easter is not a fairy tale. On Good Friday, Jesus really did suffer, terribly. And, as you'll remember, when the risen Christ appeared to His disciples, He still bore wounds in His hands, feet, and side from His crucifixion. Jesus' suffering didn't just magically disappear, nor can we glibly tell people that their sufferings will just disappear if they trust in Jesus. We have to take seriously the pain of people who have lost their jobs, who are infected with this terrible disease, or who have lost loved ones to it. We must pray in sorrow for those who have died in New York City, yet have no loved ones to claim their bodies, so they are being buried in mass graves. This suffering is terrible, and it's not over.

But what we can say, with firm faith and confidence, is that Jesus chose to come as a man among us and He willingly accepted terrible suffering, all the way to the lowest possible point of feeling separated from God, His Father, when He prayed, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned Me?" Jesus took on all that suffering and He was victorious over it in His resurrection. That is our hope today. Jesus still bore those wounds, but He did so to show His power over suffering and death. He invites us to put our trust in Him, no matter what suffering we are enduring now, so that we might one day have the joy of sharing in the victory of His resurrection.

So let us show our wounds to Jesus, let us lift before His eyes the suffering we endure in body, mind, and soul. Let us confidently ask Him to heal us by the glorious power of His resurrection. Let us commend to His loving care the souls of those who have died, especially the forgotten who have no one to pray for them.

Jesus suffered death, but His tomb is empty. He has risen from the dead. Jesus is truly risen! Alleluia!