

Did you guys notice anything strange about our gospel today? Was there something missing? Here we are, celebrating Easter Sunday...but where is the Risen Lord? As far as Mary, Peter, and John are concerned in the Gospel, Jesus is still dead. The tomb is empty but Mary thinks Jesus' body has been moved to another location. Peter and the Beloved Disciple--whom we are pretty sure is John--have seen the burial clothes. John believes...something...but then he, himself, wrote that they didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The eye-witness testimonies of these three people are extremely important, but there can be a multitude of explanations for what they have seen. Mary Magdalene gives us the most logical explanation: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

Something to pay attention to in John's gospel is the interplay of darkness and light. Today's gospel takes place in the morning, but it is still dark; John is very specific about this. Symbolically, the dawn means that Jesus is risen, but the remaining darkness means that Mary, Peter, and John don't know it yet. The darkness is also symbolic of their emotional state of mind. We know from the scriptures that Mary Magdalene and John both saw Jesus die. The scriptures don't tell us where Peter and the other Apostles were during the crucifixion, but by Sunday morning they knew that Jesus had died whether they were there to witness his death or not. They are in a very dark place. They are not able to follow Saint Paul's advice to "seek what is above...to think of what is above, not of what is on earth." In the darkness of their grief, they can only see what their physical senses tell them. There is a small flame of hope: that is why Peter and John run to the tomb, it is why John has the beginning of belief...but that small flame isn't enough to make them fully believe anything other than what they see before them. What do they need in order to believe? Before day can fully dawn, each of them will have an encounter with the risen Lord.

Two thousand years later, we know that Jesus is alive. Our faith is based on the testimonies of those who witnessed the Resurrection appearances. Peter's words in the first reading are an example of such testimony. Thanks to them, we can know about the Resurrection even though we haven't witnessed it for ourselves. Thanks to them, we know that Jesus is alive. But there are many who do not.

Last night at the Vigil Mass, I told a brief story about the first encounter that a young man from India had with Jesus. This story came from the Synod of the New Evangelization which took place in 2012. Abbot Jeremy Driscoll from Mount Angel told this story in his book "Awesome Glory." Cardinal Telesphore Toppo from India told the synod about an encounter a Catholic priest had with a Hindu teenager. This young man was clearly a spiritual seeker and he was always asking questions about Christian beliefs. The priest gave him a copy of the gospels, told him to read them and then come back if

he had any questions...which he did. The boy came back flabbergasted and accusing. He wanted to make sure that he had accurately understood what he had read in the gospels. "Jesus is risen from the dead?" he asked, "*really* risen from the dead?" "Yes," the priest calmly replied. The boy shouted back at him, "Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?" He was astonished that the priest hadn't told him that straight out from the start.

Quoting from Abbot Jeremy, "Jesus is risen from the dead. That is the central point of everything that the Church teaches. Everything else flows from that. Of course, there is much more than that to say and think about. But everything flows from the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and leads back to that. The light of the Resurrection defuses itself through everything that Christians believe and proclaim and know to say about Jesus."

That might seem like pretty basic stuff, but, apparently, nobody thought to tell it to this kid in India. How many people are out there searching for spiritual connections? People who have heard all sorts of things about Christianity...but who have never heard the most fundamental basis for our hope and faith...Jesus is risen from the dead?

That story was shared at the Synod for the New Evangelization. We have inherited the mission of the Apostles which is to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. Jesus is alive. Presumably, we are all here today because we already believe that. The question for us isn't "do we know that Jesus is alive," but, rather, "do we know Jesus?"

One reason that the church gives us such an open-ended gospel for Easter Sunday, is that she is inviting us to have a personal encounter with the Risen Lord. the Church is inviting us not only to know that Jesus is alive, but to know Jesus. This is an invitation to know Jesus personally...as our brother...and as our friend. How does this happen? It happens in the same way we get to know our best friends and the members of our families. We talk to them. We spend time with them. For Jesus, this means we have to pray. When we read the scriptures, we have to engage with them, we have to enter into them. Imagine yourselves in those scenes...the sights and sounds and smells. How do Jesus words affect you? What questions do you want to ask him? Let that time of prayer with the scriptures be the basis for your heart-to-heart time with Jesus. Whether you are praying before the Blessed Sacrament or in a quiet place in your home or out in the wilderness, make time for a heart-to-heart conversation with Jesus. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering. Some of the best times that I have had with my friends and family have been when we were just hanging out.

The Easter Season lasts until May 23rd, seven Sundays from now. Make time every day to hang out with Jesus. Get to know Him so that you can know what it means that Jesus is truly risen.

Happy Easter and may God bless you all.