

From the Pastor's Desk

You know, when a loved one dies, the world seems to be, at first, completely out of kilter. Daily rhythms are disrupted. Relationships shift. Things that seemed to be important before take a back seat, while other urgent concerns come to the fore. A whole reorientation to life without the physical presence of the loved one is necessary. It is by no means easy, remembering the death of my Father just over two years ago, but it is necessary, and God does come to our aide. In the gospel, we catch a glimpse of how the first disciples of Jesus navigated the difficult days in the aftermath of his death, how they had to construct their lives and meaning anew.

At the Easter Vigil, we hear the enigmatic ending of Mark's Gospel (16:1-7). It captures the bewilderment of the first disciples, in the figures of Mary Magdelene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who go to the tomb early on Easter morning, bringing spices to anoint Jesus's body. They are startled to see that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb and the heavenly messenger announced that Jesus has been raised and that he is not present there. They are commissioned to tell this message to Peter and to the disciples and that he is going ahead of them to Galilee, where they will see him. In a gospel where Jesus repeatedly admonished people not to say who he was, now free reign is given to proclaim him risen and alive. Throughout the Gospel, Mark built suspense, with the command "do not tell." No one can tell the story of Jesus without knowing the narrative in its entirety. This story includes the passion, death and resurrection. Only with these all-important parts at the end of the story can one begin to speak rightly about Jesus as the exorcist, teacher, and healer that he was.

Ironically, while other characters in Mark's Gospel broke the injunction to silence, now that the women are commanded to tell their story, they say nothing, out of fear. Mark is an absolutely brilliant storyteller, and he invites the reader to finish the story. His is actually an open book that is never concluded. The hearer is asked to go back to Galilee, back to the beginning, to contemplate anew the meaning of all that Jesus said and did in light of his resurrection from the dead. As in the beauty of the funeral rights today, they remember all the various pieces of his life (sacramentally) all of which take on a new meaning. The original ending of Mark's Gospel ends in awe and mystery; "And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and bewilderment took hold of them. And they said nothing to anyone, For they were afraid." (16:8). It is this mystery into which hearers are invited to enter. The resurrection is not simply a "happy-ever-after" ending or the fulfilment of our expectations. It turns the world on end and defies explanation. It is God's final parable.

The Gospel of John, which we hear on Easter morning, drives home the central question: where is Jesus now? A single character, Mary Magdalene, represents the voice of the community, as she seeks her beloved and laments, “We don’t know where they have laid him (Jn 20:2). Her search echoes that of the lover in the Song of Songs: “I sought him whom my soul loves: I sought him but found him not.” (3:1). The question: “Where?” permeates the whole of John’s Gospel. The first followers of Jesus want to know: “Lord, where are you staying?” (Jn 1:38). His answer in the cool of the day, about 4 in the afternoon is “Come and see” (Jn 1:39) reminiscent of God walking in the garden of Eden, Paradise. And in his final address to the disciples, Jesus speaks to them about an eternal dwelling place, which is not a geographical space, but his very self (Jn 15:4-10).

In John 20, there are two parts to the answer of where Jesus is now. On Easter morning, we hear the first half: He has returned to the Father (Jn 20:19). Mary, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple all verify that he is not in the tomb. The latter two return home, not understanding, but Mary refuses to leave and continues her search.

On Tuesday in the Octave of Easter, we hear the second half of the answer. Jesus himself appears directly to Mary Magdalene and tells her not to cling to him as the earthly person she knew previously. He directs her to go to the gathered community of the brothers and sisters: it is there that he is found alive (Jn 20:17). In the resurrection appearance stories the Gospel focuses more upon what happens to us than what happened to Jesus. A gospel that began by reflecting upon how “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14) concludes with the Word becoming enfleshed in each individual believer and in the whole body of the faith community. That is where Jesus is to be found, as his transformation is completed in our own.

My dear friends of Visitation Parish, that transformation is active and alive in you, pointing to your full human flourishing. Jesus died and rose for you, claims you as his own in the initiation sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, manifests his great mercy and heals you in the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing, calls you to service of the community in either the sacraments of Marriage or Holy Orders or through a commitment to the consecrated or single life, all following the universal call to holiness. This is the gift of Easter, once given, never to be taken back. Join me over these 50 days to give thanks to God the Father who raised Christ in the power of the Spirit to give you life...**TO GIVE YOU LIFE**...and give it to you eternally and abundantly.