

EASTER SUNDAY:

APRIL 9, 2023

I share with you a drama for this Easter Day –

Act One: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters....

Then God saw everything that was made. And, c’mon, look, it was very good.” So the Bible, the first words of the Book of Genesis, begins. It is the story of our world and the story of human salvation.

Act Two: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....” So the fourth gospel, according to John, begins. It is the story of the beginning of the story of the evolution of the human story.

Act Three: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalen came to the tomb and the tomb is empty. So, we read in today’s gospel, begins the new creation, the eighth day.

All of us gathered here today have been participating in creation as it continues to grow and evolve. We have been touched, in Baptism, by the Word made flesh. And, today, the first day of the week, we come together, perhaps hesitatingly, to celebrate a new creation. Perhaps, as with Mary Magdalen, it is still dark for us and we are uncertain what all this really means. Do I really believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? What difference has it made? I may find myself more drawn to the predawn darkness at the tomb. The hazy confusion, a stillness in a lonely place, the disorienting realization that something unexpected has happened. The longer I live, the less I know how to approach this unscientific irrepressible story of resurrection.

Peter comes to the tomb and is baffled. He doesn’t know what to make of the empty tomb. As John comments, “as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” So Peter returns home, perhaps alone. Then the other disciple, maybe John, enters the tomb. “and he saw and believed.” Why did he believe? I think it is because he had overcome his fears and, becoming vulnerable, loved Jesus. He was the only male disciple to be at the cross. He gave

of himself because he loved his friend. In a later post-resurrection appearance, Jesus takes Peter for a walk and three times, asks him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Mary Magdalen returns to the tomb after announcing the empty tomb to the disciples. She comes back to weep one she loved; but she now overcomes the darkness, the fears, being distraught. Jesus is there but she first thinks he is the gardener. Only when he calls her name, "Mary," does she know and recognize him. She is loved and now can love in return.

How do we overcome our fears, our doubts, and come out of the darkness into the light? I am sure it is when we love. So many of us have been good Catholics - we studied our catechism, we kept the rules, but we never came to love Jesus as he has loved us. We have been fearful, ashamed, guilt-ridden, avoiding intimacy and vulnerability. It is only when we love that our defenses come down and we can learn to believe and know the truth.

If I am standing outside the experience of faith, looking in, the presumed sequence runs something like this: if I could find the proof, then I would believe. And if I believed, then I could love God and be loved by God in turn. But it is all really the opposite. You begin by falling in love, first with the beauty of the Easter story. Then you realize that someone whom you cannot see, whom you cannot even imagine, does indeed love you. Love alone grants access to heaven, just as only those who loved Christ could see his resurrected glory. But, let's clear this up. Heaven is not a region, a place. Heaven could more properly be called a person, namely Jesus of Nazareth, wondrously restored to life and now filling the cosmos. Heaven is primarily a relationship.

To sum up, prayer and love do not follow proof. Prayer makes proof superfluous. It is a way of loving, which is the deepest form of knowing. And heaven is a relationship. It is love.

We stand outside the tomb this morning. The darkness is gone. I am like Mary. I hear God call my name: Joan, Mike, Pat, Tom, Walter, Susan, and this God says to me, "I am alive." I am alive. And I love you. This is what Easter is all about. Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen!

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