

Easter Sunday – Year A – April 12th, 2009

Acts 10:34-43

Ps 118:1-2, 14-24

I Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

Two weekends ago I was out at Christ the King Seminary leading a retreat for the Western New York Parish Nurse Association. I went in to the little kitchenette in the dormitory where we were having the retreat to make a cup of tea and I saw the stove. It was an old Frigidaire electric model that when you turn the knob to turn on a burner, there's a brightly colored orange stripe revealed, so you can glance at the stove quickly and see whether or not you've left a burner on by mistake. It's an old model – maybe 40 or more years old. It was the kind of stove we had when I was growing up. And I said softly to myself as I gazed upon it, "That's my Mother's stove." A wave of sorrow came over me and I stood looking out the window of the kitchen saying, "Oh, Mother, I miss you so much" and tears rolled down my cheeks just for a moment. It was an unexpected flash of remembrance when I could almost imagine my Mother being there.

I want you to use *your* imagination for a moment. Think of someone or something you loved very much who is no longer visible to you. A beloved pet, a grandmother or an uncle, a best friend, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a son or a daughter. Think of someone you loved very much who is no longer visible to you in this life.

Now imagine Mary Magdalene going to the tomb that morning – just to be there – just to be near the place where they had laid the body of the man she loved so much. Only the body was gone. It wasn't there. The stone was rolled away from the entrance to the tomb and Mary Magdalene went into shock. She went running full speed back to where Jesus' followers were staying, meeting Peter and John on the road and shouting to them in a panic, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!" "His body's gone," she cried, and Peter and John ran back to the tomb with her to see if it were true. They saw the linen cloths lying there, the cloths that Jesus' body had been wrapped in when he was taken down from the cross three days before. After they had seen with their own eyes that his body was gone, Peter and John turned around and went home, depressed and saddened even more than they had already been. Not only had the man they loved been cruelly murdered, even his body had been taken away. It must have been a horrible moment of utter desolation.

Weeping, Mary Magdalene stayed at the grave.

Then she looked into the tomb and saw two angels dressed in white sitting where the body had been, and they asked her why she was crying. She must have looked at them as if they were crazy! "Why am I crying? Because they've taken away the body of the man I loved and I don't know what they've done with it." She was in unspeakable pain and sorrow. Suddenly, there appeared in the garden by the tomb a man, perhaps dressed in a hooded robe, so that his face was covered up. This man said to her in a voice that was so gentle, so compassionate and so loving, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" At first, Mary thought maybe this was the person who had taken away the body of the Lord. But then he said to her in a voice that sounded like 'home,' "Mary!" She turned and saw him for who he really was, the Risen Christ, the man Jesus, whom she loved, standing right there in front of her.

Her first impulse was to grab him and give him a huge hug, a bear hug, I'm sure, and to hold on to him and never let go. But he put out his hands and stopped her in her tracks with a very strange explanation: "Do not hold me for I have not yet ascended to

my Father.” He was alive, but he was alive in a new way, in a new body, and could not yet be touched by human hands. Can you imagine how hard that was for Mary to be right there with Jesus Christ come to life again after his horrible death, and to *not* be able to throw her arms around him? Maybe she just started jumping up and down – or maybe she clapped her hands together in excitement. Surely, she cried some more, but this time, tears of overwhelming joy.

Jesus sent her to tell the others and she ran again to where the disciples were staying and shouted ahead of herself as she came near, “I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord.” And she told them all the things that had happened to her, how Jesus Christ had come to her as she was waiting in the garden alone.

We do everything we can to symbolize the glory of that moment: colorful Easter eggs, lillies, butterflies, little green shoots popping up from the ground everywhere. Signs of new life, of resurrection and rebirth. It is a glorious time of promise and we are given the gift of hope – hope that the stones of our souls may be rolled away. Hope that we, too, may emerge from the tombs of our hardened hearts and believe. Believe that anything is possible. Believe that new life, resurrected life, will come to us and to those we love and have loved in our lives.

As I stood by that kitchen window at the retreat two weeks ago, looking up at the sky and telling my Mother how much I missed her, I experienced a feeling of deep peace. I heard my Mother say in my heart, “I’m here – and we’ll have so much catching up to do. All is well and I love you.” It was over in just a flash, no longer than it takes to snap your fingers, but it was no less real.

“Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for three days in the grave had lain.
Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.
When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
thy touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.”¹

Amen

¹ Hymnal 1982 #204 “Now the green blade riseth” – *Noël nouvelet* – verses 3 & 4