

## **EASTER SUNDAY - 2007**

*“The new story begins.”*

An eerie silence fell over the city. The streets were almost empty now. The people who had watched stayed in their homes. They needed time to process all that had happened the day before. It was so violent, so brutal, so sad. The religious leaders didn't feel like talking either, even though they got what they wanted. That is, they got rid of Jesus. But their guts were in turmoil. Why had the sky darkened at the moment Jesus died, and what was that earthquake all about? They didn't like it. In fact, it took away the joy they thought they'd be feeling. The soldiers were unusually quiet as they went about their business. This Jesus was different. He wasn't like all the others they crucified as duty demanded. He didn't squirm or plead with them for mercy. He seemed to accept it. Oh well, what did it matter?

There were no words to express the sorrow and disappointment in Jesus' circle of friends. He hadn't lived up to their expectations at all. What was the point of all the hoopla that surrounded his entry into Jerusalem? Messiahs and kings don't get crucified. Some followers even made plans to leave Jerusalem to go home. But those closest to Jesus huddled together, mostly lost in their own thoughts. Some recalled that Jesus warned them about all that had happened, but they were too stunned to recall that “third day” part. And Peter, poor Peter, he was not haunted by the way he had denied Jesus three times. It was the way Jesus had looked at him when the cock crowed. He had looked at him with love. How could he?

But the grand silence was the silence of Jesus. Oh how they missed hearing the familiar voice of the one whose word had stilled the wind and calmed the sea. His word had power to heal the blind and raise the dead. Yet, it could be so gentle as to forgive an adulterous woman and to comfort

the sorrowing. It was a word that instilled hope to the marginalized, that challenged the self-righteous, that gave peace to the human heart. Oh how they missed hearing it! What had happened? What had they lost? What had the world lost? The Word was silent! It is like life itself had been sucked out of everything, like all of creation had become a vacuum that needed to be filled.

The women were not inclined to sit around, though their hearts were empty just like everyone else's. Never had anyone ever treated them with such dignity, with such respect. Jesus had really cared for them as women. He was a man who treated them as his equals. So the least they can do was to give Jesus the respect he deserved as a man, messiah or not. It didn't matter.

So, early the next day, the women headed for the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Since it was daybreak, they could see that someone had rolled the stone away, and, to their surprise, they found the tomb as empty as their own hearts. What could this mean? But before they could even ask the question, two angel-like men break the silence by asking a far more puzzling question: "*Why do you seek the living one among the dead?*" and then added, "*He is not here, but he has been raised.*" And the angels remind the women of that "third day" thing. They get it! They see! So they go back to tell the others the astounding news. Here St. Luke names the women individually, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them. I can just imagine that when they saw the others, they all blurted out at once the astounding revelation, "***He is risen!***"

The others? They think the women are talking nonsense and don't believe their story. But Peter can't get out of his mind the way Jesus looked at him. "*What if?*" he said to himself. So he got up and ran to the tomb and saw the burial cloths set aside. He reasons to himself, "*If someone had*

*taken his body, wouldn't they have left it wrapped in the cloths?"* But it wasn't. And he goes home amazed.

And that is where the Easter Story ends for us today. It leaves us hanging. Did Peter believe or not? What happened next? Well, the Church is going to take 50 days to tell the rest of the story. Our celebration of Easter doesn't end till Pentecost Sunday and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today the message is just the astounding news, ***"He is risen!"*** For starters, that should be enough! Oh, there is a lot more of the story to tell, but it doesn't even end at Pentecost. You see, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus didn't just free us from our sins, but made it possible for us to share in the life of the risen Christ. That's the most mind-boggling part! He empowers us to give voice to his words of compassion, forgiveness and peace once again. Because of our baptism, we became part of the Easter story, you and me. The risen Jesus lives on in us! Our lives are inexorably linked. *"How can that be?"* you ask. Why, it almost sounds like nonsense. *"Could it be possible that we can actually share in the risen life of Jesus?"* What if it isn't nonsense? We'd have to change. Either that or ignore the Easter story like it never happened.

Too many people still see the church as a travel agency that gives directions on how to get from here to heaven, and what to do or not do along the way. Well, Jesus didn't give us a roadmap, and the church is not a travel agency. Jesus gave us himself, his life. And if we live in union with him, it does not mean that everything will be easy for us, but it does mean that we can hope that whatever happens, somehow it will make sense. For in giving himself to us, Jesus fills the empty vacuum of the human heart with meaning. It is the risen Lord we receive in Holy Communion. May He fill us with the joy of his unending love. Happy Easter.