

Easter Sunday Homily
Given by Fr. John Koziol, OFM Conv.
April 5, 2015

Mary of Magdala came to the tomb of Jesus very early in the morning; so early, in fact, that it was still dark. She went there to pray for her beloved Jesus who had been killed two days prior. Her friend had died a horrendous death. He had been nailed to a cross, but only after hours of agonizing torture. She came to pray, to grieve and to feel close to her beloved.

For many people, going to the grave of a loved one brings comfort. Ask widows and widowers and most will tell you that, just being close to the remains of their deceased spouse brings them comfort and a sense of peace. They go to pray and remember, to honor and to mourn.

For Christians, the grave is a bittersweet place. It is a place where the reality of death cannot be denied. Our loved one is gone, swallowed up by the scary mystery of death and yet, it is a place of hope – hope that one day we will see our loved one again; that one day, we will be with him or her again and enjoy his or her friendship.

In the *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, the prayer preceding the blessing of a new grave reminds us that the grave is a sign of hope:

“Lord Jesus Christ,
By your own three days in the tomb,
You made holy the graves of all who believe in you
And so made the grave a sign of hope
That promises resurrection,
Even as it claims our mortal bodies.
Grant that our brother (sister) N
May sleep here in peace
Until you awaken him (her) to glory,
For you are the resurrection and the life.
Then he (she) will see you face to face
And in you light will see light
And know the splendor of God,
For you live and reign forever and ever.
Amen.”

For Mary Magdala and for the other followers of Jesus, the empty tomb was a sign of hope – hope that Jesus had risen as he said he would. It was also a clear sign that Jesus was once again alive – a confirmation that Jesus was in fact the Messiah of God, the anointed one who had come into the world to save us all from sin and death.

On this Easter day, we recall this momentous event and celebrate that Jesus has risen from the dead and that His death and resurrection was a “game changer” for all of us. The dying and rising of Jesus Christ is not a one-time, historic event, but rather, a continuing reality that involves each and every one of us who believe.

Jesus’ death and resurrection has changed everything. It has conquered sin and death and has opened the gates of heaven to all of us. It means that we no longer have to fear death. Death is no longer an enemy that takes away life and separates us from one another, but rather, as St. Francis

called her, a “sister” who accompanies us home to God where we receive the fullness of life for all eternity.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the glorious things God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

A few days ago, I was visiting with my friend Loren, who is dying of cancer. He is in his last few weeks, perhaps days, at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cancer Home. I asked him how he was feeling about his situation and he said simply, “None of us really knows what death will be like.” His words were so simple and honest. No we *don't* know what death will be like, nor do we know when it will come to us, but we *do* know that, because of Jesus, because of his death and resurrection and our faith in him, we know that death is not the end. Loren believes in the resurrection of Jesus and believes that death is not the end. He is preparing for his entrance into heaven.

Easter faith is all about believing and trusting that, because of Jesus, our life goes on beyond the grave. Because of Jesus' self-surrender to death, death no longer has power over us but, rather, opens for us the gift of eternal life.

But Easter faith is not just about what happens to us after we die; it is also, and maybe this is more relevant to us, it is all about how we *live*. Easter faith gives us the ability to face all the challenges and difficulties of life with courage and with hope.

Easter faith is what makes it possible for us to face pain and suffering with the belief that God will, in the end, vindicate our suffering, redeem it with His grace and raise us up.

Easter faith is what motivates us to serve one another as Jesus did. It even makes it possible for us to love those who are not easy to love, even to love our enemies.

Easter faith is what makes it possible for us, weak and afraid as we are, to stand up for what is right and good and just. It is what makes it possible for us to be faithful to the values of the Gospel, no matter the consequence. It makes it possible for us to be faith disciples of Jesus, even when our very lives are threatened.

Easter faith is the faith of the martyrs, the martyrs of the early Church and the martyrs of today, who chose (choose) to stand firm in faith, even to the point of physical death.

Yes, the prospect of death and the reality of the grave can fill us with fear, but Easter faith makes it possible to face suffering and death with courage because we believe that Jesus has vanquished the ancient enemy of death; He has become the source of new life for all who believe.

“Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, alleluia, alleluia!”