

Easter Vigil 2018

By Fr. Phil Horrigan

Most Catholics, and indeed most Christians, make a big deal out of the feasts of Christmas and Easter. Our liturgical celebrations are more than the usual, even when the usual is pretty good; the music, the liturgical environment, the scripture texts, all underscore the importance we attach to celebrating those feasts. Even our social lives are a little more active at those times of the year, (and here in the mid-west we even have the same temperatures for both).

These two important events shape and transform our lives.

Yet there is a big difference – we know what birth is all about; we don't really know what resurrection is all about. (And another thing, it's really hard to preach about resurrection!) We know what birth looks like; and mothers know its pain and its joy. But resurrection, there may be pain before, and we hope there's joy afterwards. But what does it look like?

Some of the best and most famous art in Christian iconography centers on the narrative of birth of Christ. But some of the worst Christian art results when artists have tried to depict the resurrection.

At Easter time in this part of the world, we often turn to nature for the colors and images of new life, the spring of the year speaks so vividly of a new beginning.

What is so remarkable is that it was (and is for us) the **emptiness of the tomb** that is the sign of new life. There wasn't any sign of life there, - and that's precisely the paradox for the Christian, we believe in Jesus because he wasn't there. The fullness of faith is based on the emptiness of a tomb.

The women and the disciples expected to find a sign of deadness when they arrived at the tomb, wouldn't any of us?

But instead, the women discovered that he wasn't there and they went to tell the others. And then they went, and sure enough the women were right, - there was nothing there, only some cloths lying on the ground.

What on earth was this? What on earth was this?

Ah, maybe that's the clue. This is **not about something of the earth!** As Paul says to the **Romans** and us today, we were buried in baptism but now we are raised to a new life of glory, free from the tombs of brokenness, division and injustice.

The resurrection question is the question of the women: **"Who will roll back the stone for us?"** Who will help us confront what resurrection looks like?

Will it be the newly baptized? Will they bring a new dawn into the Church that needs a fresh spirit on a regular basis, and rekindle the faith of the rest of us? Who? **Will it be the young people** who have risen up across this country to protest the gun laws, or the lack of them, confronting the indecision of those who could make a difference? **Will they be the paschal light** of a new day, a light to shine into the darkened minds and hardened hearts of those who cannot or will not see that a future without violence may just be possible? Who? **Will it be the supporters of the Me-Too movement**, who have shed the light of truth-telling and decency on the issue of abuse? Will their courage be a new dawn of respect across every generation and in every relationship?

Resurrection is not about fear, a fear of what's in the tomb; it's about embracing what awaits beyond the tomb; what's waiting for us if we dare to go to **"our Galilee"**. His resurrection is about **continued engagement in mission**; for the women, the disciples and for us. Galilee is the place where we all must go to discover a whole new world where our thinking and our values are to be very different.

The resurrection is not about the spices and clothing for a dead body, - it's about being anointed and clothed as a new person in Christ Jesus. **The resurrection is not about where we put Jesus** – either in a manger, or on a cross, or in a tomb. **These are earthly places**, - the resurrection is about where Jesus puts us. **It always about where Jesus puts us**. And he puts us on the path to make things different, to push back the darkness, to transform emptiness into fullness.

The message of Easter is that the Lord Jesus is not exactly where we expect; he **Lord is not lost, he is risen** – and there's a big difference. He will show up in the garden, or at the seashore, or in the upper room, or on the road to Emmaus, or marching in the street, and because he loves us, he will show up in each of us.

Do not be amazed! Be afraid, and yet be very glad! He is risen, just as he said.

Phil Horrigan