

Homily for the Easter Vigil

Have you ever been super-enthusiastic about a new idea that occurred to you – one that was so promising and exciting, but one which you hadn't entirely thought through? When I was a college student, I had one of those brilliant ideas – to work as a telemarketer over a summer break. I needed to make a little money, **and** someone suggested the idea to me, **and** before I knew it, I was gung ho with dollar signs before my eyes, and, and, and. *And then came the "but"*. In order to make money as a telemarketer, I'd have to convince someone to allow a total stranger to come to their house and talk to them about installing new doors or windows. Needless to say, that job really didn't last too long. In fact, I quit two days later after my trainer – who was listening in to my conversation with an elderly woman, who just had surgery and was telling me some of her woes – tried to convince me to get her to make an appointment. Looking back I think it was the priest-in-the-making in me, who felt such compassion for her!

Well, in our Gospel from Luke this evening, we heard a short summary of the Gospel proclaimed: that Jesus suffered, died, and now had risen from the dead. And we get this kind of and, and, and build-up: the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, *and* be crucified, *and* rise on the third day", and, and, and. And? And now what?

It happens that sometimes people get that far – they hear the Gospel message – all the and, and, ands, and they know the story of what happened. But then they're left with a kind of rhetorical “And now what?”, which they may never even realize is being asked or even needs to be answered!

So, “now what”? Well, our passage from Romans this evening tells us: “If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” In other words, after hearing all the familiar yet poignant details of Jesus' suffering, death, and Resurrection, a response is then required – a response of faith or belief. We are invited to believe what those first Disciples testified to with their lives: namely, that Jesus died and truly rose from the dead – this is the essence of our Christian faith, the Resurrection. But, then what? What does it mean to believe in the Risen Christ? It's a little different than waiting on Peter Cottontail!

To make a response of belief or faith in God requires our very lives. Pope John Paul II put it this way – he said, “Jesus is the answer to the question that is every human life.” This means that in Christ God desires to have a personal relationship with each of us, and that's why He gave us the Church. The Church is Christ's visible presence on this earth and the communion of all of those who are members of His Body from every time and place. In this, we see that Jesus' focus is on the relational – each of us becoming part of the one family of God united together in Him! And this starts with our baptism, by which we are born again by the Holy Spirit into God's family, the Church.

From our Gospel this evening, Peter and Mary Magdalene are shown forth as excellent models for us of what it means for belief in the Lord to be a complete and total response of our lives. They are the ones, who in their own unique ways, were with Jesus every step of the way. They are the ones – among the first – who went to the tomb to ponder in faith what happened. They were the ones, who were with Jesus in the ups and downs, in the remarkable and the mundane moments, and in the joys and sorrows of His life. In other words, they give us an example of how to love Jesus as a person. Jesus is a person and to believe in Him is to love Him personally – as a person – not simply as an idea or theological principle.

My brothers and sisters, you and I are called to imitate such a steady and enduring faith in our relationship with Jesus Christ. As the God-made-man, He is the one who loves us so passionately – so much so, that He not only united Himself with us in life, but even in death. And now as the Lord of all that is, He desires for us to let Him into every aspect of our lives: both, the private and the public, when someone is watching and when no one is looking, the moments of joy and especially those of suffering. And it's by this type of personal relationship that the Lord Jesus truly becomes *Our* Lord and the Lord of our lives. God bless you.