

Homily for the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday

As we celebrate this wonderful solemnity of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, there may be various emotions that fill our hearts and minds. Maybe, joy – for the great gift of salvation. Or perhaps, peace – knowing that Jesus has overcome death, and therefore we shall live. Or maybe even, gratitude – because of all that He has done for us out of love.

Maybe what wouldn't top our list of emotions would be words like "shocked", "alarmed", "frightened", or even "terrified". And yet, that is precisely the meaning behind the first reaction those three women had upon seeing the empty tomb. Psychologists tell us that a physiological reaction occurs in response to stressful situations. We know this as the Fight, Flight, or Freeze Response. So, for example, when, let's say, you look out your window, and see a large brown shape hanging out in the grass in front of the church, and you think at first it's a bear, but really it's one of those bulls that got out from the farm from across the road, you could either fight – maybe run out the door, and chase it back into the pen; you could flee – and run up to the highest level of the house hoping it didn't see you; or, you could do what I did – freeze – and just stare in disbelief that this creature of God is just browsing the church lawn looking for a snack!

You know, fear can do that – it can just freeze you in your tracks, or even knock you back a few steps, or perhaps even paralyze you. I get the sense that’s what happened when Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the other Mary peered into the empty tomb. The problem with freezing though, is that you can get stuck, really stuck. That response can keep you from making a choice or doing anything productive – you’re just staring. And I think it took that young man in the white robe sitting in the tomb to get their attention. In fact, this angel says to them, “Do not be amazed! Do not be shocked, alarmed, frightened, or terrified. Yes, Jesus **was** here, but now no longer. He has been raised up from the dead. So, now go and tell Peter and His other disciples. And later you will see Him again in Galilee.” He told them to get a move on. He told them to go spread the Good News. He told them to put their new-found, fledgling faith into action.

You know, my friends, I think sometimes we can get stuck just like those three faithful women did when it comes to Jesus. Yes, in our lives of faith, sometimes the temptation is to either fight God on His will or any number of issues, or to try to run away from Him and hide. And yes, most of us try both of these strategies. But, all of us can get stuck in our faith too – not going anywhere. For some of us, this is from time to time. But for others of us, this is a chronic issue. We’ve heard God’s commandments. We wish we’d pray more often. We know we should be more intentional in our faith. And yet we freeze. Sometimes staying put appears more comfortable to us than letting ourselves go in to the great unknown!

So what's the answer? What can any of us do? Well, I think our Gospel today gives us a good response – to listen. To listen to God's voice in our lives. “Yeah, Father, but God doesn't speak to me”. Oh yes He does. Having a meaningful daily prayer life is the pre-eminent way we can really hear from God in our lives.

Now, by prayer, I don't just mean reciting words as quickly as you can. By prayer, I mean intentionally talking and listening to Someone as though He's really there. For us, prayer should be a connection of our heart to God's, and His Heart to ours. Finding a quiet room – a sort of empty tomb – where you can be by yourself. Having a picture of Jesus before you or a crucifix in your hands. And talking to God from your heart. Share with Him your joys, your sorrows, your doubts, and your sufferings. Ask for His help in these areas. And then, trustingly sit in silence.

Remember though, prayer is not magic. It doesn't “convince” God to give us what we want. Rather, prayer allows God to mold us and shape us in His image and likeness, and according to His divine will. But, this molding process only happens when we sit still long enough to let God penetrate our hardened hearts and our stubborn minds and wills, so that He can then move us forward. This is what Jesus' first disciples did following His resurrection. And this is what Jesus is calling each one of us to do in our lives too. The more we seek Him, the more we will find Him. And the more we find Him, the more we will be found. God bless you.