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“In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live” (John 14:19).

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Ps 66; 1 Pet 3:15-18; John 14: 15-21

May 14, 2020, marked the 40th anniversary of the Sumpul River Massacre in El Salvador, during which some 600 unarmed, mostly women and children were trapped between Honduran soldiers at the border and Salvadoran forces who shot and bayoneted victims in the river as U.S.-supplied helicopters hovered overhead. Two months earlier, Archbishop Oscar Romero had been assassinated during Mass, the start of a brutal 12-year civil war that killed 75,000, mostly civilian, victims. One month earlier, he had pleaded with President Jimmy Carter not to provide military aid to the Salvadoran Army.

As we mark the 6th Sunday of Easter, we might ask about the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus for us, but also for the victims of the Sumpul River Massacre. Forty years after their deaths and the death of Romero, what do we believe and celebrate this Easter?

Today’s readings pose questions history does not answer because it is not finished yet, but which Easter’s earliest witnesses proclaimed: An empty tomb, encounters with the crucified and risen Jesus, and the astonishing impact of his new life as the church rapidly expanded into history to challenge us today.

No written accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection have survived before Paul's letters in the middle 50's. The Gospels were composed for a generation after that. They reveal a full-throated faith in Jesus, alive within his followers. They also describe a crucial transition from his historical presence to an even more intimate presence through his Spirit. The missing 20-year gap has long intrigued scripture scholars, who assume that the first expressions of faith were by oral transmission in the preaching and worship of the faith community.

Easter faith was formed as believers passed through a "dark interval," what poet Rainier Maria Rilke's calls the silence between notes that makes music possible. It is within this same interval that our leap of faith must occur. We join the first believers who entered the timeless mystery that gave birth to the church.

What history preserves is the fact of the crucifixion and the reality of the deaths of the innocent victims in the Sumpul River. Easter faith proclaims the ultimate victory of God's love and the assurance that at the end of the story, accountability will be full, and justice will prevail.

By faith, we join the long procession of other witnesses, including the martyrs of El Salvador, who carry their lamps through the long night of history toward the certain dawn of new life Jesus made possible by giving himself up for us. He calls our holy waiting a "little while" of not seeing him before we see him again (John 16:16). Faith is another way of seeing and trusting, not just the testimony of others, but of our own experience of Jesus alive and active in the world today.

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