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Once we really believe in Jesus, we share in his risen life

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 24, 2014 The Peace Pulpit

First of all, I share with Sister Marie in extending to all of you, in my own prayers and wishes, that you have a most blessed and joyful Easter. And I thank you for the greetings that many of you have already passed on to us. But now, as we try to listen deeply to our Scripture lessons today, I hope a couple of things will happen.

First of all, I hope that we'll get a deeper awareness of the extraordinary event that this resurrection of Jesus means, or is. It's unique in all of history. It never happened before, and yet I think sometimes we celebrate Easter and we share in all of the joy and the excitement that it can bring, but we don't have that deep awareness of how extraordinary this is. If you listen to today's Gospel, for example, Peter and John, Mary Magdalene, the three people mentioned, none of them had any clue that Jesus was raised from the dead. They simply had not understood because no one could have imagined this. It had never happened.

The Mass of Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Psalms 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-9
Full text of the readings [1]

See, in the Gospel, you might say, "Well, what about Lazarus? What about the daughter of Jairus the centurion or the Jewish rabbi?" Well, they were resuscitated. Their life was restored the way it had been before, and that's very different. What happened to Jesus is unique: A whole new way of life -- a human person transformed into a new way of life, different from anything that had been experienced or could be experienced.

We look forward to that happening to each of us, and it gives us hope also, even as some of us remember, perhaps during the past year even, losing someone close to us to death. What happened to Jesus will happen to them; it will happen to all of us. Also, I think it might be helpful for us if we enter into prayer reflecting on these Scriptures, to think about what this meant for those first disciples.

Mary Magdalene, as John says, early in the morning when it was still dark, actually before sunrise, her heart is aching. She loved Jesus; Jesus loved her, as he loved all his disciples; and she had that same deep sense of loss that any of us experience when someone we really love departs from us through death. Their hearts were aching, but now suddenly they find out Jesus is gone, but they're still confused what happened. Where did he go? Who took him away, perhaps?

See, none of that is clear at first, except to John, the younger disciple. He ran with Peter to the tomb. As remarked in the Gospel, when he entered, he saw what was there -- how carefully the cloths had been set aside and the head piece had been rolled up and put in its place, and he believed. He believed.

Suddenly, he realized what Jesus has meant, and so he was filled with that joy and life that Easter can bring to all of us when we deeply believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, has gone forward before us, one like us in every way, human, but now living the fullness of life with God as the son of God in power. If we really begin to feel what they felt, we will also feel the exuberance, the joy, and the sense of glory that this resurrection brings to our human race and to each one of us.

Finally, this morning, I hope we also will understand that we have already begun to live in the reign of God with the risen life of Jesus within us. A couple of Sundays ago, you may remember, the Gospel was about the raising of Lazarus from the dead and being resuscitated.

Before that happened, Martha and Mary, his two sisters who were very close friends of Jesus, as was Lazarus, kind of rebuked Jesus: "Why weren't you here when we called you? He was sick." Jesus had delayed two days before he came, and when Martha confronts Jesus, [she] says to [him], "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you," and Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said, "Well, I know that he will rise in the Resurrection, at the last day." But Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection. I am the Resurrection. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, will live. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die." See, once we really believe in Jesus, we share in his risen life. We're already living in the reign of God. We have life guaranteed forever, and we can begin to realize the joy, the peace, of that reign of God even now.

But it means for that to happen, we must change our lives so that we live the way Jesus taught that we must live when we begin to follow him and share his life. And how we should live is expressed in many different ways throughout the Scriptures, but perhaps in today's second lesson, it's given to us as clearly as we could ever hear. Paul writing to those Christians in the city of Colossae, in his writing to us: "So then, if you are risen with Jesus" -- "If you are risen," and we are -- "then seek the things that are above where Christ is at God's right hand, for you will die, and your life is now hidden with Jesus in God."

And so, this wasn't part of our lesson today, but Paul then goes on to give it explicit instruction -- what it means to live with your heart set on what is above: "Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God's risen people, holy and beloved." Put on compassion; put on compassion, begin to reach out, experience what others experience, their sufferings, their pains, their happy times, kindness. We all understand what kindness means, but make it really part of our life.

Humility: not exalting ourselves over others. Meekness and patience: bear with one another and forgive one another. "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and then the peace of Christ will overflow in your hearts. And so always be thankful." Those words should be our guiding words now as we live the way of Jesus in our risen life.

I'll just give you one quick example. I read about it this morning, actually, in the paper, about what compassion and kindness means. There are obviously many examples, and you probably could come up with some of your own, but this one seems so striking. It was an article, actually in the obituary, about a Wall Street banker, a very wealthy person who, some years ago, felt his life was meaningless. He was making all kinds of money, but there was no real purpose in his life. He wasn't experiencing joy.

Every day, he lived in a rich suburban area but traveled into the city by train. As he was leaving and heading home through the train station, he saw a woman there, homeless, begging, and he at first just passed her by, but then he stopped one time to talk to her. He discovered she was desperately in need and mentally ill. He had compassion; he knew he had to do something. So he investigated and discovered there was a place called Jericho Homes, which was exactly what was needed -- a place where mentally ill people, hopeless people, received help and care.

He managed to arrange for her to move into Jericho Homes. Then a short time later, he quit his job and he became, first of all, on the board of Jericho Homes, but then he took the job as executive director without a salary. He was giving his life in compassion and kindness now to those who were desperately in need, mentally

ill homeless people. His life became full and joyful.

That's an example of what happens when we follow the way of Jesus -- we live the risen life of Jesus. We must change our lives according to the pattern of Jesus, as St. Paul has told us. Kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness and, above all, love. These are the things that mark the lives of those who are risen and alive in Christ, our risen Lord.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish in Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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