

## SEEING, BELIEVING, WITNESSING

Easter Sunday – Cycle C – 21 April 2019

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Col 3:1-4; (or, 1 Cor 5:6b-8); Jn 20:1-9

*“We were chosen by God as witnesses ... God commanded us to preach” (Acts)*

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. Seeing → Believing → Witnessing. This seems to be the ‘growth in faith’ dynamic of Jesus’ closest disciples. The first reading from chapter 10 of the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ is from one of Peter’s earliest sermons wherein he summarizes the entire story of Jesus’ life and mission on earth. However, Jesus’ death is not the end-point since, “God raised him on the third day.” How totally transformed Peter is! From being one who fearfully denies Jesus, Peter now becomes fearless preacher who proclaims: “We are *witnesses*—we have eaten and drunk with him *after his resurrection* from the dead—and *He has ordered us to proclaim* this to everyone...” This speech will end with the Holy Spirit being poured out on all those who had assembled in the room to hear Peter; and many will be baptized, Gentiles included. It is important to note that the Greek word for ‘witness’ and ‘martyr’ is the same: *marturia*. Authentic witnesses are so unshakably devoted to Christ that they do not fear anyone or anything—not even martyrdom.
2. The gospel passage has disciples who see, believe and give witness to the good news: Mary Magdalene, Peter and John. The light of Jesus’ resurrection emerges out of the darkness of his death. The reading begins with Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb “while it was still *dark*”. Here, darkness is not just physical, but metaphoric and symbolic. Darkness has enveloped Mary’s heart and spirit because all seems dark in the absence of her Guru, Jesus. It is the same with the other disciples—all enveloped in darkness since they have no one to hold on to, now, and nowhere to go. Mary’s procession is two-way: she went to the tomb, found the stone rolled away, and then “she ran” back to tell Peter and John: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (v.2). This news is puzzling to Peter and John—two of the three of Jesus’ closest disciples—who also run to see whether Mary’s report is, indeed, true.
3. Some interesting details are present in the gospel passage. First, John reportedly reached the tomb first (since he was younger and could obviously run faster); but he waits for the elder, *numero uno*, Peter, to enter first. Was it respect for elders? Or, was it (by the time the gospel of John was written) an acknowledgement of the primacy of Peter whose foremost place among the apostles was restored and recognized? Be that as it may, it would appear that by entering into the empty tomb and emerging from it, Peter was entering into the dying and rising of Jesus. Second, there’s the detail of the burial cloths. Peter and John *both* see the cloths rolled up and laid neatly in the tomb. Had anyone robbed the body, they certainly would not have rolled them up before carrying away the body, would they? Unlike resuscitated Lazarus who emerges from his tomb with the cloths wrapped

around his body (Jn 11:44) for he will need them again (!), Jesus is done with burial cloths; he leaves all his burial trappings behind as he is risen and will die no more. Third, great importance is given to the act of *seeing* and *believing*. We are told that Peter sees the cloths, but only the beloved disciple *sees* and *believes*. Eventually, not only these three disciples—Mary Magdalene, Peter and John—will see, believe and witness, but each of us, today, will be called to do the same.

**Linking the Second Reading(s) to the Main Theme:** Two readings are suggested for Easter Sunday with distinct, but interrelated, stresses. Easter is neither the recollection of a past event nor even its representation in word and sacrament. But, Easter is *here-and-now*—a daily participation in Jesus’ risen life despite the daily death and darkness, sin and sorrow that seem to bury us in tombs and coffins of our own making. Both readings contain an indicative and an imperative. (a) In the letter to the Colossians the ‘Baptismal indicative’ is: “You have died and you have been raised.” Thus, the imperative: “Seek the heavenly things!” and, (b) In the first letter to the Corinthians, the ‘Eucharistic indicative’ is, “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed,” and so, the imperative: “Get rid of all the old yeast!” It was customary for Jewish housewives to dispose off stale yeast and bread before the Passover feast. Passover bread was baked with fresh yeast and relished with finest wine. Jesus, our new Paschal Lamb, has destroyed death and restored Life, bidding us to: “*Be new bread!*” Live Easter lives, anew!

**Three Current Concerns:**

*The Electoral Concern* – These days, we are faced with political and electoral choices. Amidst the death, decadence and darkness around us, we must make responsible choices not only for ourselves or even for our small communities, but also for the ‘greater good’. Will we able to give witness to our faith in the days to come?

*The Ecclesial Concern* – We are shocked and terribly concerned about the Parisian Notre Dame cathedral being burned down. Rightly so. But, in the magnificent Temple of Jerusalem Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and I will build it up in three days” (referring to his resurrection). You and I are God’s Temple. Many will seek to destroy our churches and chapels. But, when the time comes, will we stand together to ‘build’ Christ’s Body, the Church?

*The Eschatological Concern* – Easter is a forward-looking event. Empty tombs and rolled-up burial cloths evoke some memories. But, we are primarily called to go forth and look ahead! See! Believe! Witness! The movie ‘*The Least of These*’ running in theatres highlights the life, mission, vision and murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons Philip and Timothy who were burned to death. Graham witnessed to Christ’s resurrection by a life dedicated serving lepers in Manoharpur, Orissa. At his burial, his wife Gladys and daughter, Esther, reportedly sang the hymn: “Because He lives, I can face tomorrow!” St. Pope John Paul II rightly said, “We are an Easter people! Alleluia is our song!”

**Reflect:** It’s said: “An empty tomb proves the truth of Christianity; an empty Church denies it.”

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