

Easter Sunday April 4, 2010

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

What is Your Role?

Alleluia! He is risen. We come here this morning to celebrate the Good News that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead; that He has conquered death once and for all. Satan thought he had won the battle by conspiring to have Jesus humiliated and put to death. But he failed to understand that it would be through death that Jesus would conquer sin and win the great victory of His Resurrection.

How often do we fail to understand the ways of God? We have a very limited perspective and need to accept many things purely on faith. It is difficult for us and it was difficult for the followers of Jesus that we see in our gospel story. The last line of the gospel speaks of John and Peter as they examined the empty tomb and says: *“For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.”* Mary of Magdala thinks that the body of Jesus had been stolen. She says: *“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”*

Our three main characters in our gospel this morning, John, Peter, and Mary of Magdala, had all been close followers of Jesus and had heard His teachings over the years of His public ministry. Yet they all struggled to understand the great mystery we celebrate this morning. The three all had different roles, and they all had different relationships with Christ. That is the same with us as well. We come together to make up the Body of Christ. All are called to contribute in the celebration and worship, but all in different ways. Let us look at our three characters from our gospel and see how we might be like them.

First let’s look at Mary of Magdala, and, of course, the other women who came with her to the tomb that first Easter morning. We know there were others present because when she raced back to find Peter she said, *“We don’t know where they put him.”* We’re told that they came to the tomb while it was still dark. Mary and the other women came out of dedication, out of a loving devotion and service. They represent in many ways the worker bees of the Church who keep things going. They work, often behind the scenes, to care for the Body of Christ. They can be those taking care of the poor, the sick, and the needy. They can represent parents caring for their families. They can be those who come early while it is still dark to prepare the church for worship; people like our organist, Luke, who was here at 7:00 this morning practicing and preparing our music for our 8:00 liturgy even though he was here late last night for the Easter Vigil service. It is not only him though, but also our sacristans, our greeters, our lectors, our altar servers, our choir members, our catechists, and all the others who work behind the scenes to minister to us, the Body of Christ. Whenever we reach out in service and charity, even within our own homes, we are a bit like Mary of Magdala.

Next we can look at the apostle John, the one referred to as the beloved disciple. He had the closest relationship with Jesus of all the disciples. He is the only one who stayed with Him at the foot of the cross. He is the one who, representing us, took Jesus’ mother, Mary, into his home. John can represent those who have a very committed prayer life; who love Jesus very much and just want to be close to Him, to communicate with Him, to pray to Him present in the tabernacle. We can think especially of those who dedicate their lives to prayer for the Church. We all know

people who are praying at all times in their daily lives for their own intentions and for those of the Church and the world. And these people are also very important to the Church. Whenever we set time aside to be alone with Jesus in prayer we are like John the apostle.

And finally we have Simon Peter. We hear that John ran faster and arrived at the tomb before Peter. I don't know if he was driven by greater love or because he had the benefit of youth, but we do know that he waited and let Peter enter first. He waited out of respect for Peter who was the leader of the apostles; Peter who Jesus had established as the rock of His Church. Peter wasn't better than the rest. He didn't come before dawn to prepare the Body of Christ; he wasn't even around on Friday to help them take Jesus down from the cross. Peter didn't love Jesus more than John. But Peter was given a special role and responsibility. Our priests have special roles and responsibilities, but it is important to remember that they are not automatically holier than the rest of us. Father Ezequiel as our pastor is in a special position of authority and has certain duties that the rest of us cannot perform. But he needs to maintain a strong prayer life and dedication to service to maintain his holiness; it doesn't automatically come with ordination. He needs our prayers. And hopefully some of the young men of our parish will answer a call to a vocation as a priest. Let us pray for our current priests and for an increase in vocations, especially during these last months of the Year of the Priest celebrated by the entire Church.

In our three characters from the gospel we have examples of service, of prayer, and of leadership. They are all important to the health of the Church, but they are just three ways; there are many more. And, obviously, all the different roles are not meant to be mutually exclusive. For example, we need to have a combination of prayer and service. Either by themselves can lead us astray. We can't separate them, but we will have a different balance. And, of course, we need holy priests; they cannot just be authority figures without a dedication to service and a strong prayer life.

This Easter morning as we have renewed hope and celebrate a new springtime of our faith, reflect on your role and ministry in the Church, your role in carrying on the mission of Christ. Our faith requires that we are moved to action. We cannot just say that we believe in Christ, but then not have actions that witness to that belief.

What are your actions that confirm your beliefs? How do you honor our Risen Lord? How do you serve Him during the week? Some of your answers will be different from those of the person sitting next to you, but some should be the same, and all need to have answers. For example, some, but not all, are called to come to Mass every day of the week, often while it is still dark. But all of us are called to come each Sunday. It is the least that we can do for a God who loves us so much that He was willing to suffer and die for our salvation.

We celebrate the Resurrection this morning, but as we do we reflect back on the events of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. We do this to see how Jesus gave us an example to serve one another. We do this to understand how much God loves each and every one of us. Let us, on this day of joy, make a commitment to love God and our neighbor by serving God and our neighbors; our neighbors who, along with us, make up the Body of Christ.

Deacon Joe Hulway