

Fr. John's Homily for Easter 2023

JMJ CHS

With last night's Easter vigil Mass we paralleled what we did back a few months ago on Christmas Eve. The readings for the earlier Christmas Mass do not directly speak about the actual birth. That truth would be celebrated a bit later at the midnight Mass and in the morning. Last night we looked forward in anticipation of that hidden moment that will occur sometime later that night, in fact during the early morning hours of the third day.

Jesus will defeat death. His Spirit will be reunited with his body, and He will rise from the dead. And He will have a new and glorified body. (Here at the morning Masses we see this as something which has now already happened. It's Easter Sunday and we celebrate His resurrection.)

Very early in the morning Mary Magdalen and friends came to the tomb to do what they were not able to do on the first day. Their intent was to prepare the body for burial with herbs and spices. But because of the approaching Sabbath, they were not able to do so. Jesus was simply taken down from the cross, wrapped in a linen burial cloth and then placed in the tomb. Then the Passover Shabot would begin.

Good Friday evening I wondered about the Blessed Mother? Where did she go? Was she all alone in her grief, or did she stay with the women? Or did John immediately begin his new task of taking care of her? He had been given that assignment earlier that day from the cross when the dying Jesus said to him, "*Behold, your mother.*" But we know that John actually was with the Disciples, at least on the morning of the third day. He and Peter would run to the empty tomb after hearing from Mary Magdalen that the Lord had risen.

Now although it's not in the Bible, there has been a lot of speculation about what Jesus did first after He rose from the dead. Pope John Paul II seemed to think that He went directly to His mother. She knew what her son's destiny was from the very beginning, and she was the closest to Him in His passion. And even though she had a particular insight into all of the events, she did, in fact suffer great emotional pain. And we recall what was predicted 33 years earlier by the old man Simeon, in the temple, who said to her, "*and a sword would pierce your soul.*" Jesus would have wanted to pull that sword out as quickly as possible, and bring her anguish to an end and replace it with resurrection joy.

So then, I think it's safe to assume that this was His first stop before appearing to Mary Magdalen, and then that evening, the rest of the Disciples, and the following week, to that doubtful Thomas.

Recently I did a School Mass and the topic of my homily was based on the readings of that day, and it was about Jesus trying to persuade the Pharisees that He was the Son of God and that he knew Abraham. They mocked him and said "you're not even 50 years old and you've seen Abraham?". Remember His response? "*Before Abraham came to be, I Am!*" Here, some 2000

years later, He is saying the same thing to us: *I Am.... God*. But I told the children that there have always been false teachers out there, and that in our time there seems to have been more. I know of stories, and I trust you do as well, of teachers, who are in positions of power, prestige and authority exerting their influence on us. Their students.

I told this particular story of a woman who recently came to me, and said that she attended Mass once, locally, and the preacher told the story of the Feeding of the 5000. It was trendy for a while with many modern biblical scholars to say that the feeding of the 5000 was not that much of a big deal, that the people really had food with them, but that the real miracle was that Jesus persuaded them to share their food with each other. (Oh puuuleeeeeease 😊 give me a break!) The lady was incredulous, and called the pastor on the next day to address the issue with him. What are you saying, that Jesus was not capable of feeding the 5000 people? Are you maybe also implying that he did not really heal the sick, or cleanse lepers? Or cast out demons? What are you gonna tell us next, that He did not rise from the dead?

Yes, there have been far too many false teachers who have gone that far and have dismissed the transcendence of God Himself, Jesus. Demoting Him to something less than the Great I AM.

Many of these false teachers have sown doubts into young formable minds and therefore take their toll on them. We are looking at that toll. A lot fewer people attend church these days. Now there are many reasons for that but certainly there is the poison of false teaching that has been part of our lives for so many years.

Now, this year, at Eastertime, as with Christmas, I presume we will probably find certain specials on the television that address the topic of the season – Jesus and The Resurrection. Be on your guard. Read the Gospels. Re-read the Resurrection story itself. Pick up a good book from our lending library or our Book Shop. Our bookstore staff does their best to make sure that no false teachers are represented there. And by all means, pray for your priests. And deacons. We are your local teachers. Remember that we, too, as part of our training, had to listen to false teachers along the way. And sometimes maybe we are not that clear ourselves on what is true and what is not? False teaching causes confusion and it can take years to clear things up. Frankly, I think there's lots of good news out there. If the faithful extend the effort, there are many places we can go to study and learn. I think we've turned the corner with our seminaries and I now believe that there are many good teachers who have been trained well and are now there to assist us on our journey back to the truth.

Jesus said to His Disciples at the Last Supper, “*And when I leave, I will send the Holy Spirit who will lead you to all truth*”. Throughout these next 50 days of this Easter season, leading up to Pentecost, let us invite the Holy Spirit to descend upon this Church named after that same Spirit, and make us a beacon of truth and light to our neighbors, and to all who come near. To all who pass this way.

~Fr. John