



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Resurrection of the Lord

April 1, 2018

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

Today we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. While the birth of Jesus and his death on the cross inspire wonder, gratitude, and reverence, they can never be fully understood apart from his resurrection. The incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus form one seamless whole: taken together they represent the plan of God to redeem all of creation through him. To understand this, we must understand the purpose of Jesus' coming and what became possible through his death and resurrection.

Jesus came into the world because humanity was separated from God through sin, causing suffering and death for all of creation. Jesus set aside his divine status and power and took on a human life as part of God's plan to save his people. Because he was human like us, Jesus gave a merciful, human face to an unseen God. He announced the good news that God loves all people and desires to be close to them. He taught people how to love God and one another. In his words and actions, he demonstrated the mercy, compassion, healing, and forgiveness of God. He invited people to experience peace, joy, and transformation in the life he shared with the Father and Holy Spirit, and to join them in a kingdom of love that would last for eternity.

Since human life involves suffering and death, Jesus knew that he, too, would suffer and die. Jesus understood his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45)--the cost of setting a slave free. He did not view his death as a punishment, as if God required his death as payment for our sins. Jesus' death was not an act of divine retribution, but was part of the sacrifice he made in order to make salvation possible, a sacrifice he willingly made out of love for the Father and for us.

Jesus' death alone did not achieve our salvation. St. Paul wrote that if God had not raised Jesus from the dead, our faith would be in vain. Without Jesus' resurrection, we would have still died in our sins (1 Cor. 15:14, 17) but when God raised Jesus from the dead and restored his life, the claims of sin and death on humanity were destroyed. Because Jesus shares his life with all who believe in him, every believer is set free from the bondage of sin and death, becomes a new person in Christ, and is restored to God.

New life in Jesus is made possible through his life, death, and resurrection. We renew our baptismal promises at Easter as we recall the new life that Jesus has shared with us through Baptism. In him, we have every reason to hope and rejoice! **Alleluia!**

Scripture Readings for Easter

The Scriptures for Easter tell the story of our salvation. You are invited to read these Scriptures for yourself over the next week. In the readings for Easter, we journey from the creation of the world in Genesis, to the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter morning, then on to one of Jesus' first appearances to his disciples. The source for each of the Easter Scriptures is provided below, followed by brief comments intended to help put the reading in context.

The Promise of Salvation: The Old Testament

Genesis 1: 1-2; 2

The first of two creation stories in the Bible, this version employs a majestic, poetic style to convey how the world, and everything in it, came into being through the power of God's word. God creates humankind in his own image. He gives man and woman dominion over all his creation.

Genesis 22: 1-18

By this time in human history, humans have sinned and lost fellowship with God. God calls a man, Abraham, into a relationship with Him. He promises Abraham (who, with his wife Sarah, has no children) that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. God promises him a land in which they will live as his people. As a pledge of his promise, God blesses Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac, despite their old age. God asks Abraham if he would return Isaac to him in sacrifice. In absolute trust, Abraham prepares to give his only child back to God, but God stops him. Because of Abraham's obedience, God renews his promise: He will make Abraham the father of many nations.

Exodus 14: 15—15:1

Throughout their history, God's chosen people often turned their back on God. As a result of their sinfulness, they became weakened as a people and twice were enslaved by other nations. This passage tells the story of God's intervention on behalf of his people when they were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up a leader for them, Moses, who asks Pharaoh to let them go. When his pleas go unheeded, God sends plagues upon Egypt; still, Pharaoh refuses. So God gives Moses a plan of escape. The Red Sea stands between the enslaved Israelites and freedom.

When Moses, following God's direction, raises his arms, the water recedes and the people pass through on dry land. When Pharaoh and his mighty army give chase, Moses raises his arms again: the water flows back upon Pharaoh's ensuring army and destroys it. Israel's deliverance from slavery reveals the power of God and his determination to save them

Isaiah 54: 5-14

This message was delivered by the prophet Isaiah during Israel's second period of slavery. Exiled in Babylon, after the city and temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed, Isaiah offers a message of hope. Using a metaphor of spouses separated by infidelity, God acknowledges that he was angry at the unfaithfulness of Israel, but now with great tenderness and pity resolves to take Israel back. Not only that, but God, the faithful husband, renews his covenant with faithless Israel, vowing to love her forever, establish her and her children in peace, and protect her.

Isaiah 55: 1-11

The second reading from Isaiah is an invitation from God to the Israelites to return to him. Those who turn to God will find him extravagant in blessings, mercy, and forgiveness. Isaiah reminds the people that God will renew the covenant he made with David, whose descendant will preside over an everlasting kingdom. There is also a hint here that "other nations" will join Israel, suggesting God's covenant will be extended to all. God ends his invitation with a reminder that his words are not idle or empty. His will shall be achieved.

Baruch 3: 9-15, 32; 4:4

Baruch was a scribe for the prophet Jeremiah. He wrote during the time of the Babylonian exile. In this passage, Baruch reminds the people that it was their abandonment of the laws and ways of God that resulted in their capture and slavery. He admonishes them to return to the laws of God and follow them, for that is where true wisdom, strength, and understanding are found.

Ezekiel 36: 16-17a, 18-28

The prophet Ezekiel has a message for the Israelites captive in Babylon. God allowed them to fall into the hands of their enemies when they abandoned his law and defiled themselves with their evil conduct. However, God acknowledges that, while the Israelites have profaned his name by their wrongdoing, others nations have questioned how God could abandon the people of his covenant. So, for his name's sake, God will prove his holiness before all nations. God will rescue his people. He will call them back to the land he gave their fathers. He will thoroughly cleanse them of their sin. He will

give them new hearts--hearts that will want to obey his laws. He will keep his promise to their ancestors. He will be their God and they will be his people.

The Fulfillment of Salvation in Jesus: The New Testament

Romans 6: 3-11

The letter of St. Paul to the Romans was written almost 600 years after the Babylonian exile. Israel has been restored to their land; the Temple of Jerusalem has been rebuilt. Jesus has been born, descended from the house of David. He has come announcing that the Kingdom of God has arrived. He preached a baptism of repentance so that the people could believe and enter the kingdom. St. Paul wrote his letter about 25 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul, a pious Jew and member of the Pharisees, persecuted the followers of Jesus until he had a revelation from God and came to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. Here, in one of his letters, he reflects on the meaning of our Baptism. According to Paul, when we are baptized, it is as if our life is fused with Jesus's life: our old selves die to sin when he dies, we rise to new life with him in his resurrection. After Baptism, we live for God in Jesus.

Acts of the Apostles: 10: 34a, 37-43

This reading from the Book of Acts is a report of a speech delivered by the apostle Peter after the Resurrection. Peter, no longer hiding in fear after the death of Jesus, is boldly proclaiming the Gospel. Peter has witnessed the risen, glorified Jesus. Peter has been transformed by this. He knows with certainty that Jesus was sent by God for the forgiveness of sins. He shares that news with everyone.

1 Corinthians 5: 6b-8

Paul writes to the Church in Corinth which is struggling. Some members have lapsed into sinful behavior. Using a metaphor of bread-making, St. Paul reminds them that the Sacrifice of Jesus has given them new lives (new dough). He reminds them that evil (like yeast) has a way of growing, so they must make every effort to remove it from their lives and live like Jesus.

THE GOSPELS: Mark 16: 1-7; John 20: 1-9; Luke 24: 13-35

Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would die and rise again, but none of the sad and weary disciples would have expected to find an empty tomb on the morning after the Sabbath, when they went to anoint the body of their beloved Jesus. That day, the glorified Jesus, risen from the dead, begins his appearances to his disciples. Jesus helps them understand all that has happened.

Beginning to Understand

When Mark opened his Gospel with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” he was telling us the title of the entire work: The “beginning of the gospel” applies to Mark 1:1 to 16:8. Mark’s last verse challenges the reader to take up the task of continuing the work that Jesus began. According to Mark, the last part of this most important story in history begins with a small group of women taking on an impossible task. They were carrying spices to anoint a body they didn’t expect to be able to see or touch. But that’s only a small detail in this symbol-laden narrative. Mark’s Gospel usually seems very simple and direct, but he fills this narrative with symbolic ideas and gestures so that we can hear the story again and again, each time understanding it more deeply.

Mark writes that as they arrived at Jesus’ tomb, the major concern of the women who had witnessed Jesus’ death was the humongous stone that walled his body off from the land of the living. The only words we hear from them question who could move that boulder.

From the way Mark narrates the story, it seems that the women were talking to one another near the sealed tomb when they looked up and discovered that the stone had been rolled back as if from the inside. The place of death had been broken open, and terrifying as it was, they went in and encountered a messenger who told them that Jesus the crucified had been raised and could not be found in the realm of death. The messenger then commissioned them to send Jesus’ disciples to Galilee where they would see him as he had told them.

This is where the Easter Sunday Gospel stops. It ends much as Mark ended his Gospel by telling the disciples to go back to where it all began and retrace their journey of discipleship, this time a little better prepared to understand what it was all about.

More than any other evangelist, Mark is aware of the frailty of the disciples. He knows that they are thickheaded and slow of heart and that it takes more than one vision for them to come to active belief — that’s why he told two stories of Jesus healing a blind person and sandwiched Jesus’ three predictions of his passion in between them. It’s not a simple thing to allow Jesus to open our eyes.

That stone that concerned the women, the barrier between them and Jesus, turned out not to be what they thought. The fact that they were going to anoint him indicated that they had accepted his death; the fact that they expected the stone to block their way indicated that they didn’t understand it. The stone that sealed the tomb signified the absolute finality of death, the end of relationship and the burial of hope. It was the symbol of the tragedy of mortality and the women who had stood by as Jesus was executed had faced and accepted it. They had done more than their male companions who had changed the subject when Jesus spoke of his death and fled when he confronted it.

Like most Christians, the women took the next step without knowing what it meant. They went into the tomb. With that step, they went beyond witnessing Jesus’ death. Now, they were symbolically participating in it. That step made good on their sharing of the cup with him at the Last Supper, but they still didn’t comprehend it. The world had been turned upside down, nothing meant what it had before, and they were justifiably terrified. God’s messenger in the tomb told the women to announce that Jesus had been raised to the disciples. They were to tell the disciples to start all over again so that they could understand that everything Jesus did was, as Mark said in the first verse of his Gospel, just the beginning.

The women’s entry into the tomb, like our baptism into the death of Jesus, was the first step in a lifelong process. Paul’s letter to the Colossians reminds us that through baptism we have died and risen with Christ and that brings us into a new realm of existence. But this is not magic. It requires a long process of going back to the beginning and understanding again and again who Christ is and what it means to be his disciple.

Easter Sunday is the beginning of a 50-day period of celebration and meditation on the Christian mystery. Today we are invited to journey with those faithful women who were ready to attempt an impossible final act of love only to discover that nothing was as it had seemed. This is the beginning, not the end.

