

## **EASTER TRIDUUM HOMILY 2006:**

**“IMAGINE IT SIMPLE. IMAGINE IT DONE.”**

**By Father Joseph T. Donnelly**

### **III. EASTER VIGIL/SUNDAY**

In our three day liturgy of the Sacred Triduum we have been reflecting and praying about this central mystery of our Catholic Christian faith under the direction expressed in the slogan on that sign of our construction company that has been greeting us lately as we enter our parking lot from Rt. 172: *“Imagine it simple. Imagine it done.”* We noticed his simple act of humble service washing the disciples feet. We also noticed his sacrificial love for us in his death on the cross. Now as we come to the conclusion of the Triduum at this Easter Vigil we may have to depart from the simplicity called for by that sign and venture first into a bit of a complex problem posed by the Gospel account we just heard proclaimed.

As you may know during each liturgical year in the Church we read a different gospel account, Matthew, Mark or Luke and use John primarily during the Easter season. This particular year we are reading the Gospel according to St. Mark. Saint Mark’s Gospel is the shortest and most concise of the four gospels made up of a mere 16 chapters. As the shortest and the first written account of Jesus’ life and ministry we might say that it captures the “first impressions” of the early Christian community about Jesus.

There has been some controversy down through the ages about the way that St. Mark’s Gospel ends. Scripture scholars tell us that according to earliest manuscripts today’s

gospel passage is the original ending of that gospel despite the fact that most versions of the Gospel include another 11 verses. The thing that can cause the controversy is that St. Mark's account does not end as the other three gospels do with stories of the disciples actually seeing Jesus. Rather this text ends with three women coming to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus, finding the stone mysteriously rolled away, stepping inside the tomb itself only to find a "young man", supposedly a messenger of God, who tells them that Jesus is not there. These three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome had been companions and helpers of Jesus and the apostles for the years of his public ministry. The Gospel writer names the three of them as we read last Sunday in Mark's account of the Passion as the only ones at Calvary "looking on from a distance" and the two Mary's as watching where Jesus was buried. In other words these were women who were very faithful to Jesus to the point that they continued following him long after the apostles had fled into hiding.

The messenger in today's text tells the three women that Jesus is alive and that they should go tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will go before them to Galilee and that they will see him there. But the Gospel writer then tells us that the women fled from the tomb trembling and astonished and did not say anything to anyone about it "for they were afraid". And that's where the first and shortest gospel ends. No appearances of Jesus. No great professions of faith by any disciples. No resolution of the tension. Just three frightened women running away from the empty tomb.

So how did we get here today? Something must have happened or we and the Church throughout the ages would have nothing to celebrate today. The other Gospels written later than Mark's tell of several appearances of Jesus and great professions of faith by Peter, Thomas and other disciples. In the second century some authors are believed to have added the extra 11 verses to Mark's gospel telling those stories by that time well-known in the Christian community of an appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene, to two disciples on a road outside Jerusalem, the sending of the apostles and the ascension of Jesus. Because these stories are confirmed by the other official Gospels they are accepted by the Church as part of the official New Testament, but it is the conclusion of most scripture scholars that they were not part of the original gospel of Mark.

I think we need to go back to those three faithful women and reflect again on what actually happened to them if that is where this shortest and first Gospel originally ended. The messenger of God told them to go back "to Galilee", that the risen Jesus was going *there* before them and would meet them *there*. Now Galilee was about 80 miles north of Jerusalem where all this was taking place. Did the messenger mean for them to take that physical journey again?

Probably not. "Galilee" meant two things for the disciples of Jesus. First of all it was the place they were from, where their families and friends were and where they lived their lives. Secondly it was the place where they first met Jesus, where Jesus first called them to follow him and where they first witnessed his wisdom and power. Is it fair to conclude

that the only way to really discover the meaning of the resurrection is to connect the story of Jesus with the experience of their daily lives? For the meaning of the resurrection is so much more than an empty tomb and the say-so of a divine messenger.

Each of us too must experience Jesus real and alive in our own lives, in the values and commitments, the joys and the challenges, the highs and the lows of our unique daily lives. In other words we must experience Jesus alive *where we live*. That is our “Galilee”. Remember the promise of the angelic messenger in the Gospel: Jesus will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.

Like the women in the Gospel we need some objective criteria in order to recognize Jesus. The objective story of Jesus learned from the Scriptures, the life of Jesus shared regularly in the Eucharist, and the similar experience of Jesus alive in other believers found by belonging to a faith community like the Church all offer us good accurate criteria that will help us recognize the real Jesus rather than a facsimile created by popular imagination or superstition. But we must take that criteria and reflect on it from the perspective *of our lives in our lives*. Not at an empty tomb will we understand the resurrection, but on the path of trying our best to follow Jesus’ way in the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves. Not in convincing proof or physical evidence, but in the stuff of our lives, in daily relationships, in worship and in trust do we meet the risen Jesus. The thing that most effectively blocks our way to real and mature faith is our unwillingness to meet the risen Christ on *his* terms rather than on ours.

And so once again, imagine it simple.

Jesus is really alive and with us. He goes before us to the places where we live and wants to meet us there. He invites us first of all to get to know him through the sacred stories of our faith as shared with others and celebrated in the life, liturgy and mission of his community the Church so we will be able to recognize him amidst the details and complexity of our lives. If we are open to his presence, Jesus promises to meet us where we live.

And once again, imagine it actually done in your life and mine.