

**Jesus Shows Us Another Way – Part III:
The Way of Faith-filled Vision
Easter Sunday 2009
Fr. Joseph T. Donnelly
Sacred Heart Church, Southbury, CT, U.S.A.**

Throughout our three day liturgy of the Easter Triduum, the high holidays of our faith, we have been praying and reflecting about the economic and cultural turmoil in which we find ourselves these days. We have acknowledged that greed has caused this situation and as a result it has undermined our well-being and that of our nation and our world significantly. It is clear that the way of greed just does not work even on a practical level. However we have noted that Jesus through the events of his passion, death and resurrection shows us “another way”. We believe that his is a better way that can yield better results for us personally, for our nation and for our world.

In our celebration of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening Jesus showed us “the way of humble service” in washing the feet of his disciples. In our celebration of the Commemoration of the Lord’s Death on Good Friday afternoon Jesus showed us “the way of self-sacrificing love” in his willingness to die for us. We acknowledged in our reflection, prayer and rituals that both of these “other ways” of living promise and could in fact yield much better results than what the ways of greed and self-centeredness have caused.

But we need the our celebration of the Lord's Resurrection tonight to complete this trifacta much like Jesus needed to experience resurrection to bring the unique way that God has chosen to save the world to completion. It is never enough to stop at the death of Jesus. I believe that this evening's/morning's celebration offers us a third alternative to the way of greed and self-centeredness and that is "the way of faith-filled vision".

This year as you may be aware in our GIFT program we studied the Creed of our faith, the same creed that we will profess in a few moments to renew our baptismal promises and which three new members will profess here for the first time as they are received into the Catholic Church. In one of our GIFT sessions we investigated our belief that Jesus died and rose again and in another we investigated what we call "the last things": our death, resurrection, and what we believe about the afterlife, heaven, hell etc. One of the most common reactions we got from the adults taking part was their spontaneous observation that people today do not talk much about these things, or at least do not talk about them seriously. We may kid and joke about death or what happens when we die, but serious adult talk about them is rarely part of our conversations. Do you find that to be true?

Death and what happens when we die makes many people very uncomfortable. Notice how many people will not visit those who are dying or go to wakes or funerals. Notice how many people do not know what to say when a relative of a friend dies and as a result say nothing. On the other hand perhaps in good intentioned attempts to make sense of our faith and not appear outdated or (God forbid) too religious, we have allowed our conversations about the meaning of life to become more about self-

fulfillment, illness and recovery than about death, resurrection, heave, hell, forgiveness and salvation. We can tend to talk and more importantly live as though this life is all there is. But is it?

Among the most powerful and therefore the most sacred experience we can ever have is to be with someone when they die. Have you ever had that experience? The moment is all the more sacred when it is someone whom we love or who has played a significant role in our lives. Among the many questions, reflections and perspectives that can arise in us at such times are: What just happened? Where is my loved one? What does this mean? Will this happen to me too?

I find funerals to be among the most powerful moments of my pastoral ministry. At funerals here we offer a family member or friend the opportunity to give a eulogy reflecting on the person's life and faith. I am blown away time and again by the beautiful, sensitive, insightful and tender eulogies I have heard right here. But I am also curious about what the one giving the eulogy means when they say things like that the deceased person is "at rest" or "with God" or "in heaven", or "with her husband or his wife" or "at peace". Granted we have no first-hand knowledge about what happens when we die other than the experience of the only One who ever came back from the dead and talked about it, Jesus. And Jesus assures us that physical death is not the end of life for us any more than it was for him. Jesus assures us that we will rise like he did if we try our best to live like he did: in humble service of others rather than trying to get and have more for myself and in self-sacrificing love rather than self-centered concern for me and my needs. One of my theology professors used to put it cryptically:

“Jesus promised us two things if we sincerely believe in him: your life will have meaning and you going to live forever. If you get a better offer, take it!”

And that is where “the way of faith-filled vision” comes in. If I am looking at life as if this is all there is and, thus, this is all I should be concerned about, then getting ahead, possessing more things, having a good time and dying with the most toys makes all the sense in the world. But if what we are celebrating in these three holy days is true, then I need to look at life much differently. I need to look at it with a vision shaped by my faith, by what I profess to believe. And that is easier said than done!

Let’s look at the wonderful Easter Gospel that we just heard proclaimed for some help with this. The three women, who had followed Jesus, ministered to him as he ministered to others, witnessed his crucifixion and as our Passion account last weekend ended, saw where he had been entombed, now come very early in the morning after the Sabbath intending to anoint his body as was customary at the time. But they find the tomb open, the stone having been rolled away and a messenger tells them that Jesus is not in the tomb, that he has been raised. Then the messenger gives them the key to seeing and experiencing the risen Jesus, which is to say he gives them the key to faith. He says “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you.”

“Galilee” meant two things to the disciples of Jesus. It was the region of Israel where they were from, the place where they lived their lives. It was also the place where they first met Jesus and from where he called them to

follow him. The messenger's message was this: go back to where you live, where the energy of your life is, where your family, friends and life's work are and connect the story of Jesus with the story of your life. The story of the resurrection is so much more than an empty tomb and a divine message, but you will never know that unless you connect it with your everyday life.

Each of us must experience a living, risen Jesus in the real situations of our lives too or else all of this that we do and teach here is, at best, wishful thinking and, at worst, escapist superstition. You and I need the vision, the perspective and the guidance of real, living and mature Christian faith in order to meet the risen Jesus alive and with us in our real lives and to avoid the pitfalls of greed, dishonesty and unbridled desire for more that have wreaked such havoc on our culture, our nation and our lives. This does not mean that we add some kind of spiritual veneer to our lives and to what we experience. It means that we recognize what is really there: a living, loving, resurrected God who gives meaning to our lives and promises that if we are faithful to his way of humble service and self-sacrificing love that we will, like Jesus, live forever.

It also means that we acknowledge what recent events in our nation have shown us: the way of greed does not work and does not bring prosperity, satisfaction and peace. We believe however that the way of Jesus does.

Some of you have told me that when I preach, things I say stir you in one way or another. I would ask you to pay attention to the stirrings for I believe that one of the many advantages of placing yourself in this setting of the

Church that speaks specifically of God and God's presence and call for us all is that in fact God does touch and move human hearts here in a very concrete and particular way. On so many occasions wonderful conversations and experiences have resulted when you have contacted any of us on the pastoral staff and asked to follow up on whatever stirred you here. And so as we always do here, I ask that you neither avoid nor deny the stirring. Contact one of us this week. There is no obligation, but there is the possibility that you may be able to appreciate or understand your faith and how you might make your faith a richer, more mature and life-giving resource for you and for your family.

May risen and living Lord Jesus be with you, guide you and give you peace!