

Homily for Easter Octave: April 5, 2021

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We continue to celebrate the resurrection as the source of our hope, even in dire situations. Jesus' resurrection proclaims clearly that evil and death will not win. Yet at times we let despair and fear control us, and so we call out to our compassionate God. Lord Have Mercy!

As we just heard, "Do not be afraid" are the first words of the lightning-bright angel at Jesus' tomb. Yet, the two Marys left Jesus' tomb fearful and full of joy—almost a contradictory set of emotions—which we too may have felt in the face of a major decision about life. Joyful that a decision was finally made—yet some level of fear—wondering how that decision was going to work out. So, a resurrected Jesus is good news for both Marys and simultaneously a cause for them fearing about what resurrection of a crucified friend is all about.

Then they suddenly do meet the resurrected Jesus, who also said, "Do not be afraid," The two Marys take off with good news, perhaps running even faster than before. Their fear has probably all but disappeared.

Meeting the resurrected Jesus became a source of great news for the women to tell, but it became bad news for the tomb guards, still shaking in fear at experiencing the earth-quaking and blinding-light resurrection. Their report seemingly catalyzes fear in the hearts of the Jewish leaders, who perceived the guards' resurrection news as a potentially big problem if Jesus' followers spread the news about Jesus rising from the dead. So, the religious leaders' quick fix was to bribe guards, and most likely the heads of the government, with money and a deceitful story about Jesus' corpse being stolen. These leaders couldn't face or want to believe the truth of Jesus' rising from the dead.

Their quick fix didn't work, as we now know. The resurrection news did spread, in spite of being banned and in spite of apostles along with many other Christians being killed. Those who stuck with the faith-truth of Jesus resurrecting did suffer but also became all the more emboldened to build a new temple of the Mystical Body of Christ.

After beginning to prepare this homily, I happened to do a quick read of Saturday's Arizona Republic newspaper. There I discovered two major present events that have potential for hope but also fear. The Minneapolis court case of Policeman Chauvin, who may or may not be convicted of murdering George Floyd, could prompt riots. We hope and pray for a peaceful and just settlement.

Secondly, over 16,000 asylum seekers held back in Mexico by the United States, some migrants waiting with children since September 2020, are becoming more frustrated as still more asylum seekers arrive, crowding Tijuana, Mexico alone with more than 9,000. Conditions in tent camps are deteriorating as misinformation spreads, patience wears thin and crowding intensifies.

Let us pray that in these two cases sincere efforts at true justice will win out and Easter hope will strengthen all parties involved while preventing fear-driven inaction. Hopefully the respective authorities and leaders will avoid making ineffective or even false quick fixes. As Easter people, let us choose hope-filled and helpful ways of thinking about these two scenes and about our own anxiety-loaded challenges of life. As Jesus said, **“Do not be afraid.”**

An important note from the [Catholic] “New Jerome Biblical Commentary,” p. 673, about Matt 28: 10: “The discovery of the empty tomb is not absolutely essential to the bare minimum of Christian faith (it is not mentioned in the creeds or early kerygma, e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-5), but it is an external support for that faith. In strict logic, empty tomb and resurrection do not necessarily entail each other: Jesus could have risen and the corpse be in the tomb; Jesus could have not risen and the tomb be empty (the corpse could have been stolen). But the two [resurrection and empty tomb] fit together well and are asserted by [all] the evangelists.” (written by biblical scholars R.H. Fuller and P. Perkins)