

Homily: March 31, 2024

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Felices Pascuas—Happy Easters—the first of 50 days of Easter. We celebrate God’s loving power in opening the tomb and raising his Son, Jesus, into glorified life. The resurrection gives us hope and new life. We celebrate Easter, although we can’t possibly imagine how great and magnificent resurrected life is—for Jesus and us now and after we die. So, we call to our compassionate and life-giving God, “Lord, have mercy!”

I am impressed by Mary Magdalene's loving bravery. The apostles and anyone close to Jesus, like Mary Magdalene, were suspects. Nonetheless, in the dangerous dark, Mary goes to the tomb. She finds the stone was rolled aside, and no dead body lying in the tomb. Peter enters and sees the burial cloth and the head covering laid aside. Burial cloths rolled up and placed at the foot and head ends of the tomb slab were signs that death was done and finished. Perhaps similar to a used napkin placed at the side of the plate, it means our meal is finished. On that first Easter morning, neither death nor its tomb could hold back Jesus, the man of total love and his **boundless** spirit of love and forgiveness.

God’s **boundless** love and mercy raised Jesus and enabled Him to be free--no longer trapped in a tomb. Jesus’ resurrected body became **boundless**. Jesus became a mystical resurrected body, now capable of inviting all others to participate in and with him. Through baptism, which many of us will renew shortly, we became members of the resurrected body of Christ, whom a tomb of death cannot imprison. God, the source of love, freed his son for **boundless** love.

Paul reminded us in the second reading that you and I, who have died in Christ through the waters of baptism, have our life “hidden with Christ in God.” Therefore, we who are baptized into Christ are to be people who work with God in Jesus Christ to free others from various kinds of tombs TODAY—such as tombs of addiction, loneliness, grief, and depression; the tombs of discrimination and injustice, and the feared tombs of war, terror, bombs, and mass shootings—to name a few. God calls us to work with him in opening tombs.

Strangely, the Gospel ended by saying the apostles “did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” We are more blessed than the apostles, who didn’t have the full scripture as we have in our Bible today. We are also more blessed than the apostles because we have witnessed 2,000 years of history of Christianity and various forms of Jesus’ resurrection happening over the centuries. Every time evil forces have tried to quash, crush, and extinguish love and kill people who loved greatly, love and the spirit of those loving people would break through to a new level of life and existence.

Jesus is the most glaring example of that resurrection dynamic. His resurrected mystical body is now over one billion people. Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus’ blazing light and voice of merciful love knocked Saul to the ground. Saul was an evil force, capturing, chaining, and killing Christians. However, Jesus resurrected the death-dealing Saul into new life. Saul became St. Paul, the most fantastic missionary ever.

Now to a more recent resurrection story. Who can say that Martin Luther King is dead? Assassinated, yes, but alive now in many other people still fighting for the fulfillment of civil rights. Who can say Bishop Oscar Romero is dead? He predicted a type of resurrection when he said that more than a thousand would replace him if someone killed him. After Bishop Romero was shot dead in 1981 at the altar, many of those who replaced him were laypeople and also other priest and bishops who bravely began overturning injustice where they found it.

Many of you Hispanic folks suffered a tomb of discrimination here in Phoenix, especially years ago. However, even today, many of our colored sisters and brothers in this country and elsewhere experience a tomb of discrimination. Discrimination is a form of death by trying to limit and not respect the rights of certain groups of human beings whom God created in his image.

I will tell one short resurrection story I heard a few months ago from a Mexican who worked as a young man with five other white construction workers. One day, all six men entered a restaurant for a noon meal. The waitress took the opening orders of coffee from the white men and left. They called her back and said, you forgot to take this man's order. She responded, "We don't serve Mexicans here," she left for the kitchen.

The waitress came and poured coffee for the five white workers and departed. Then the head of the team said, "Hey, guys—add milk and sugar to your coffee and mix it well." They did. Then he said, "Do this," as he poured his entire cup of coffee onto the tabletop. They all stood up and did likewise. Coffee flowed all over the table and onto the floor as they left the restaurant.

Resurrection was happening. First, Juan, the now retired Mexican construction worker, told me he felt incredibly supported by his fellow workers. He felt like a new and highly respected person. Secondly, nonviolent protests like this happened elsewhere, too, and began slowly to diminish anti-Hispanic sentiment in this city. nonetheless, there is still work to be done to open this tomb of discrimination.

God is calling each of us to be resurrection people by working with him through Christ by opening tombs. May these events turn into inspiring resurrection stories, too. Let us pass on resurrection stories from one generation to the next. Then, one day, all of our sisters and brothers who remain entombed in addiction, despair, discrimination, loneliness, or injustice will be free. Then we can stand with Mary Magdalene, the apostles, Bishop Romero, Martin Luther King, and other tomb-openers and sing, "Jesus Christ is risen TODAY--ALLELUIA . . . "