

EASTER VIGIL – YEAR B - 02

“Finding Jesus In Galilee”

(Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 117 (118); Mark 16:1-8)

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When Oblate Bro. Bertrand Guay died in Île-à-la-Crosse in 1983, Fr. Claude and I decided that we would do a northern funeral with the people and not rely on undertakers, except to have them prepare his body. We would use his van and pick up his body in Meadow Lake ourselves. However, when we got the call from the undertakers that the body was ready, we forgot his favourite suit hanging in the rectory in Beauval. As we discussed our dilemma with the undertaker in the presence of the body, I noticed that it was quite bloated. We were told that was because he had died of a heart attack. I asked the undertaker how they would have gotten the suit on him if we had brought it. He replied that they would have cut the suit in half and slipped it on him. It struck me that we could do that back in Beauval en route to Île-à-la-Crosse and no one would have to know about our gaffe. Problem solved. The undertaker showed us how to take the cover off the casket and that is what we did. It was a bit scary, certainly for Claude who was the nervous type, but I felt touched that this would be my last gesture for Bro. Guay.

I could not help but compare this experience with Bro. Guay, to that of the women in the gospel as they were going, early in the morning, to perform their last gesture of love for Jesus, to anoint his body after his burial. Surely the feeling that I had when slipping the suit coat on Bro. Guay must have been similar to what they were looking forward to experiencing in that tomb that morning long ago.

But then suddenly everything changed and they were astounded. The stone was rolled away. They entered the tomb to find an angel who told them that Jesus was not there, that he had risen and they were to tell the brothers to find him in Galilee. Not surprisingly, we are told they were frightened out of their wits and said nothing to anyone.

What are we to make of this stupendous, incredible turn of events? What are we to do in the light of it? Does it not mean that we, too, are invited into a whole new way of living and being in this world, to also believe that he has risen, and to also find him in our own Galilees?

With all those other powerful, prophetic readings that we pondered lovingly and meditatively during the vigil as a supportive background, let us walk through this gospel to draw out its deeper meaning for us.

The first thing we hear is that it was just before dawn on the first day of the week. I remember a four day fast I did once. We were instructed to stay up all night to do our work until the first bird sings before dawn. How I longed for that interminable moment.

This statement, just before dawn on the first day of the week, is not incidental. It is a key to the gospel. The gospel writer is telling those who would listen that what those women would experience is the first day of a whole new creation, a new world order, a brand

new way of being in this all too wounded, battered and bruised, tired old world. And we can be part of that new creation through faith in Jesus, the Risen Lord.

Secondly, the huge stone was rolled away. That stone was stamped with a royal seal of the emperor. All the worldly power and authority of the civil ruler, Caesar, was printed onto that stone. It was a serious offense, punishable by death, to tamper with this stone sealed in that way. Yet the stone was rolled away! The meaning is clear – there is at work here a much greater power, a new creative and liberating power, than the so often oppressive and unjust power of worldly rulers. Politicians, beware, something much greater than any political power seen before has manifested itself – the power of unconditional creative forgiving love, the power that was totally discounted by the leaders who did not understand Jesus, who judged and condemned Jesus. We are invited to believe in and participate in that kind of power in our own lives.

Third, the women entered the tomb. That action by the women is a very real invitation for us to enter our own empty tombs, to set out on our own faith journeys of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. That stone was placed there, not to keep the dead body in (dead bodies don't go anywhere) but to keep people out. The authorities feared that the disciples would come to steal the body, so they blocked the tomb and sealed it shut. But the stone was rolled away and the women entered the empty tomb. So can we; so must we.

We are told in other gospels that all that was left in the tomb were the burial cloths of Jesus. Those burial cloths symbolize our sin and sinfulness. We are invited, accompanied by the Risen Lord, to stop reacting to our painful past in anger and retaliation, to stop running away from our painful past into addiction and distraction. Instead, we are invited by the empty tomb to deal with our hurts the way Jesus did on the cross - through forgiveness and healing which is what resurrection is all about. We can now confidently set out on our own personal and communal healing journeys with the power of the Spirit of the Risen Lord to help us.

Lastly, an angel told them that Jesus was not there, that he had risen, and that they were to go and tell the disciples they would find him in Galilee.

Galilee is where Jesus grew up as part of the Holy Family in such an ordinary way that no one knew who he really was, other than a carpenter's son. Galilee is where he began his public ministry which began with many miracles. Galilee is where he was accepted and where everything went well. Galilee is contrasted to Jerusalem where he was resisted, tested, confronted, judged, rejected and finally crucified. The risen Lord wants his disciples now to come back to Galilee, to begin this new creation of the unconditional love of God manifested through forgiveness and compassion. It is literally the inauguration of the reign of God here on earth through the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit.

The catch is that it will be in Galilee. It will be nothing out of the ordinary. It will continue to be hidden from those who think that Jerusalem - that possessions, greed,

prestige, fame, power and control are the only way to operate in this world. It means that his followers, including all of us who are gathered here, must only, indeed may only find him in the small, hidden, marginalized, ordinary corners of our lives and our world.

But oh, how much joy, serenity and peace there is for those fortunate to be given the gift of faith, to believe this, to give their lives collaborating with the spirit of Jesus in building up that mysterious, almost imperceptible reign of God here on earth in our time and in our place.

Such were the saints throughout the ages. Such were even some of our own contemporaries. Henri Nouwen was one such person. He was a learned teacher, philosopher, spiritual writer and strong believer in Jesus of Nazareth who is the Risen Lord. He tried to express his faith by writing for the ordinary person. He would write and rewrite until his own nieces and nephews could understand what he was trying to say. He was also very human, sharing his struggles with his sinful human nature in a very open and humble way. He even joined L'Arche, choosing to live with the mentally challenged, as a way of being even more human. He found himself with the help of the little ones, the neglected of our society. My predecessor, Archbishop Emeritus Peter was the liaison bishop for L'Arche and invited him to spend a few days in the bishop's house in The Pas. He preached in our little chapel and I was able to meet him, finding him a very humble, quiet spoken person.

*In *The Holy Longing*, Ron Rolheiser OMI wrote a moving dedication to Henri Nouwen that best captures Nouwen's 'imperfect' influence upon so many: "By sharing his own struggles, he mentored us all, helping us to pray while not knowing how to pray, to rest while feeling restless, to be at peace while tempted, to feel safe while still anxious, to be surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness, and to love while still in doubt. Nouwen embraced his crosses, carried them and allowed them to lead him to Jesus." His close friend Robert Jonas reminds us that "his ever-present accompanying shadow was there only because of the Light in which he walked."*

The Eucharist that we celebrate together on night of all nights is food for our journey into this new creation that God has fashioned out of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

May we participate in it with faith, and open ourselves to its transforming power. May it mold us into the Body of Christ, the Church, missioned to go out and tell others that they too will find the Risen One in their own Galilees.