

HOMILY EASTER SUNDAY

“The Transforming Power of Easter Faith”

(Acts 10:34, 36-43; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20:1-18)

On Ash Wednesday in one particular parish, children were invited to come forward to receive posters with the word “Alleluia” written on them. They were then instructed to “bury” the posters by pacing them into a big box before the homily where they would stay throughout Lent until Easter. On Easter Sunday they were invited to open the box and out came helium balloons with the word “Aleluia” written on them. Their exuberance at this transformation of posters into balloons captured the spirit of the celebration and affected the whole assembly.

Let your faith in the Risen Lord transform you into an apostle of Good News.

Peter’s speech to Cornelius in the first reading is the fruit of a long and intense journey with Jesus. The power of his bold insight comes from the many times that he did not “get it” in his life with Jesus on earth, especially his denial of Jesus, and then the profound forgiveness that came to him from Jesus’ three-fold reminder that he was loved and forgiven. It is from those transforming moments, as well as from this vision, that Peter’s address carries its power to us as well. Immediately we are plunged into the missionary activity of the Church as well as into the radical inclusiveness of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Paul’s words to the Colossians have the universal power to speak across time and place. A succinct summary of the kerygma, it is especially Christ’s glory which is now revealed in the resurrection and in turn reveals our glory by a life grafted onto him in baptism. Post-resurrection faith in Jesus stresses radical breaking of human barriers, whether between Jews and Gentiles, past, present and future, life and death, or heaven and earth. In Christ we have died to earthly things even while we go on living on earth, and we now have the possibility to live life in accord with the things of heaven. This is the key passage that Jesus opened up in his death and resurrection. This is the Easter proclamation par excellence.

The passage from the Gospel of John communicates the transformation in the followers of Jesus in the aftermath of Christ’s resurrection. The full range of discipleship has been embodied in Peter: confession of faith; misunderstanding and misplaced enthusiasm, and denial, Peter has many roles in the gospel of John, but the beloved disciple, never named, has only one role – to embody the love and intimacy with Jesus that is the goal of discipleship in John. The shock and chaos over the empty tomb is followed by an act of faith, opening their minds finally to the meaning of the scriptures.

In Mary Magdala, sorrow and disbelief give way to faith when she dares to look away from the tomb, from death, and discover a new horizon of life in the risen Christ. It is to her that the risen Lord entrusts the command to “go and tell,” making Mary the “apostle to the apostles.”

That kind of Easter faith is present in the custom in Latin America considered subversive by some national governments in which one person called out the names of those killed or disappeared, and another would call out “presente,” meaning “Present.” With Christ as the firstborn from the dead, no human being is forgotten and all have been clothed with the dignity of salvation. When we pray “with the angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven,” let us say “Presente” for all those who’ve suffered innocent killing, for all those whom the world forgets and whom God will remember forever.

Another example of Easter faith is Lucy. She was a very tense and serious woman given to sudden outbursts of anger when things did not go her way. A visiting missionary noticed this, suspected abuse in her past, and invited her to go on a healing journey. Sensing his sincerity, she hesitated but finally accepted. He invited her first of all to write out her story – to go back to when she was in her mother’s womb and before her first memory, to discover what was happening to her mother and in her family during that time. Then she wrote all she could remember from her first memory to the present day and shared that all with him.

He then invited her to receive God’s forgiveness through sacramental confession for how she had reacted negatively to all that hurt by hurting others. The next step was to forgive her abusers. She did this by sharing her feelings of hurt with love to those who had abused her, without blaming, name calling or seeking revenge, in letters that she either delivered or read aloud to him if the recipient had died.

This healing journey was painful but transformative – she was freed from anger and resentment, sadness and self pity, shock and shame, guilt and fear – the spiritual burden that she had carried for years. Her family and friends who knew her were amazed at the change in her, by her gradual emergence into the Lucy they had known as a child – a Lucy who could laugh again, tease, play and have fun. She had experienced the power of Easter faith.

The Eucharist that we celebrate is itself a sacrament of transformation – simple gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the body and Blood of Christ, the Risen One. We in turn who receive it are transformed into the Body of Christ, apostles of the Good News.

So, let your faith in the Risen Lord transform you into an apostle of Good News.

