

Homily based on the readings from March 31, 2024 (Acts 10.34a, 37-43; Colossians 3.1-4; John 20.1-9)

Once we reach adulthood, human beings rarely – if ever – encounter anything that is truly *new*. Once every few decades, there might be a technological marvel that takes our breath away, but – for the most part – what we tend to see are reconfigurations and refinements of familiar patterns and practices. The world around us *changes*, to be sure, but in safe and incremental steps that allow us to retain the *illusion* of stability.

Today's Gospel presents a situation where three individuals – Saint Mary Magdalene and the Apostles Peter and John – experienced an event that was utterly incompatible with *everything* they had previously known. A few days earlier, they had seen Christ being brutally executed on the Cross – a horrific sight, to be sure, but not at all uncommon under Roman occupation. What they witnessed when they arrived at Jesus' tomb, however, was so totally unexpected that their *brains* could not process what their *eyes* were beholding.

As with all human beings, these three had been living with death their entire lives. They *knew* that death was inescapable – that it was woven into the basic fabric of the universe. Even though Jesus had foretold and foreshadowed his Resurrection on numerous occasions, they were still unable to comprehend the situation they were facing. At first, the only explanation that even *remotely* made sense was that Jesus’ body had been stolen.

The events that would unfold over the next few days and weeks radically reshaped their understanding of death *and* life. The Apostles and the other followers of Jesus – individually and in larger groups – repeatedly encountered the Risen Christ in the flesh. They saw him, they spoke with him, they *ate* with him. These “witnesses chosen by God” had the unique opportunity to experience something entirely and amazingly *new* – not just something *they* had never seen before, but something that had never occurred previously in the entire history of the *universe*. When

shackled to the Lamb of God, the iron bonds of death had simply crumbled into dust.

The world after Christ's Resurrection is not the same as it was before. Everything that happened subsequently – the establishment of the Church, the evangelization of peoples and nations around the world, the ongoing practice of the Christian faith – is a direct consequence of this one unprecedented and unparalleled event. Christ's victory over death was not an isolated occurrence, but a fundamental change to the structure of the universe.

The point, of course, is that every single one of us – man, woman, and child – has been invited to share in the glory of Christ's Resurrection. *Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.* Anyone who attended the Easter Vigil last night at St. Mary's had the joy and the privilege of witnessing two of our sisters and one of our brothers in Christ receive the Sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism – whether we receive it as an infant or as an adult – we die to sin and are reborn

with Christ. In the words of Saint Paul: “you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” All of the sacraments – all of the graces we receive from God – are an outgrowth of that one astounding event that took place – on *a green hill far away* – nearly two thousand years ago. It is that event we celebrate today, and *every* Sunday when we gather to worship.

As I mentioned earlier, few of us have the opportunity to encounter anything truly *new* in our daily lives. On the whole, I think that is a good thing. Our focus instead should be on making *ourselves* new. By accepting Jesus Christ into our lives – through the sacraments and teachings of the Church, through our personal prayer life, through our actions toward our fellow brothers and sisters – we allow *him* to refashion *us* according to his own design. Again quoting Saint Paul:

Put off your old nature ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

And so, my brothers and sisters, I wish you all a joyful Easter. Amidst the festive trappings of the day – amidst the much-needed fellowship with family and friends – remember that Jesus Christ has done and is doing something completely, utterly, and astoundingly *new*. He will make *us* new as well, as long as we are willing to make a place for *him* in our lives and in our hearts.