

## Easter Vigil

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 12, 2007 The Peace Pulpit

I must say again how thankful I am to be back here tonight and I thank all of you for being here and for celebrating with such enthusiasm and such joy and such beauty. It really is a blessing and a grace to be among you once more.

As we listen to the Scriptures tonight, probably the most challenging part of the Scriptures are the words that God tells Moses to say to the people. This is from the Book of Exodus: God tells Moses, "Go tell the people to go forward." Tell the people to go forward -- think about what that meant. They were facing the Red Sea. Behind them at some distance were the Egyptians who were intent on taking them back into slavery. "Go forward," God says. What a challenge. They had to have total and complete trust in God to take those steps forward. It seemed like walking into death, but they did trust and God brought them through -- to new life.

Of course, what a marvelous symbol that is of our baptism. As Paul describes it in our lesson tonight, "When we're baptized we're plunged down into the water to die, to be buried with Christ but then to rise to new life."

This challenge to go forward is a challenge that Jesus himself faced. If you go into the Gospel of St. John, you find that just before Holy Week, right at the end of the public life of Jesus, he's confronted with a situation where people from outside the Holy Land, outside the Chosen People, want to meet him. It's a very famous passage. They come to meet him, to find out more about him, perhaps to become his disciples. When they come Jesus tells them a short parable. He says, "Unless the seed falls into the ground and dies, it remains itself alone but if it dies, it rises to new life." A very short parable that Jesus probably was reflecting upon for himself because he was about to be put to death. John tells us that as Jesus tells this parable then afterwards he becomes deeply troubled. He's thinking about what's going to happen and he's filled with emotion, with fear and he says, "What shall I do? Pray God take me from this hour." But then, with confidence in God, Jesus is able to say no -- "God glorify your name," and Jesus goes forward in trust. He moves forward into death but with confidence in God that somehow, even through death, new life can come.

The first disciples -- after the events of the death of Jesus -- God wanted them to go forward. They were confused. Probably some of them were upset, even angry, because Jesus seemed to have been such a promising new leader for them. Now he was gone. Remember how those two disciples Easter Sunday night described in Luke's Gospel are walking along the road, leaving Jerusalem and the stranger comes up alongside and asks them what they're talking about. So they tell him, "Haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth? We thought he was to be the great prophet. We thought he was to deliver Israel; that we would become a great nation again. But he's been crucified. He's gone."

In the Gospel we heard tonight, the women don't really know what's happened. They go and they tell the other disciples but the other disciples think it's nonsense. They're confused. They're afraid to go forward. But then they begin to experience Jesus alive and in their midst once more.

John is the first. If you read the account of the resurrection in John's Gospel, we're told how John saw the empty tomb, saw the cloth and he believed. He was ready to go forward. Peter and the other disciples were still confused, afraid, not knowing what to do, but gradually, the word spread and the experience of Jesus being alive and in their midst began to happen again and again to all of them and they began to give witness to Jesus alive, risen from the dead. He had gone forward into death but came to new life and so they had the courage then to go forward.

They became a joyful community -- a community alive with new spirit, with new life and with a new mission. Now they were the ones to go forward out into the world to proclaim the Good News about Jesus, to bring healing, to overcome oppression and injustice, to begin to proclaim the Reign of God. They were ready to go forward and they did. So that message began to be spread down through the ages and throughout all the Earth.

Now it's our turn to go forward.

We're in a very difficult point, I know -- the community of St. Leo -- but will we have the courage, have the trust, the faith in God that we can walk even into death and come to new life? We will if we really take seriously what Paul writes to that church in Rome. "When you were baptized you were plunged into the death of Jesus, into the waters of baptism. Now you live with new life." You can go forward. You can be that joyful community that those first disciples were as they experienced Jesus alive in their midst.

Jesus is alive in our midst tonight. If we touch into that life of Jesus, let Jesus touch our hearts, enter into our spirits, then we will go forward. We will not go into the realm of death. As the angel told the women, "He's not here. This is a place of death." We will leave the place of death -- violence and killing, war and terrorism -- to proclaim new life. We will challenge the realm of death as we're inspired with Jesus and we will challenge our own situation so that we continue to grow as a community of joyful disciples, ready to continue to serve, to proclaim the Good News, to heal, to set the downtrodden free, all of those things that Jesus calls his disciples to do.

Tonight as we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection of Jesus, we must know that God is calling us to go forward, to go forward as the community of St. Leo, to go forward as a joyful people, a courageous people, a people ready to do God's work, to continue to be the presence of God here.

Surely if God could support the Chosen People in the desert, bring them through death to life, -- if God did that for Jesus, if God did that for those first disciples -- God will do that for us. So I urge all of us, have courage and let us go forward to make the Reign of God happen.

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