

Tomb watches

Joyce Rupp | Mar. 26, 2010

It all began with a post card tucked inside an envelope with a letter. I'm sure my friend never knew what that small print of the fourteenth station of the cross would generate in me. Neither did I. But I did know the instant I saw the print by the Southwest artist Ettore (Ted) DeGrazia that something (or Someone) tugged at my Lenten spirit and asked me to look longer.



DeGrazia's print shows the body of Jesus wrapped in a

traditional mummy-like white shroud, lying on a stone slab. Ah, but the body is not alone. All around it are shawled, sorrowing angels keeping vigil. Their soft rainbow colors dare the darkness of the tomb. Slightly bowed as they sit, one knows immediately that their hearts are weary with sadness for their Beloved. They watch with patient vigilance, attending the One who has given all. They trustfully wait for the piercing light of resurrection to banish the gloom of death's house.

I carried DeGrazia's fourteenth station with me everywhere that Lent. One day in Montana a woman stood up among the retreatants and she described how their parish has a 'tomb watch' every Holy Saturday. They enter a room of physical darkness as they ponder the tomb of death and the radical eastering of Jesus. They vigil and they wait silently, as do the angels in DeGrazia's depiction of the fourteenth station.

I understood then the power of these angels surrounding the shrouded body of Jesus. I saw clearly how each of us needs 'tomb watches' every now and then. Maybe we are keeping vigil for a part of ourselves that lies dormant and seemingly dead or lost or has fallen into a coffin of depression or despair. Maybe that shrouded figure in us is the loss of a way to pray, a deadening unforgiveness, or a body experiencing its physical limitations. Maybe our 'tomb watch' is our becoming the angel of vigil, attending someone else in pain or sickness. Maybe the vigil we keep is for the people of our world as we weep for their woe or for the Earth itself as she continues to experience humanity's reckless waste and the grime of greed.

We all have our angels. They sit like DeGrazia's shawled figures who lovingly attend the body of Jesus. They now wait with us until the light returns. And from these angels we learn how to tend the tombs of others, how to keep vigil with them in their dark dead times.

Easter is about ?tomb watches.? It is about love that keeps vigil and waits and believes in life, no matter how dark and empty and cold the inner space feels. Easter is about hope that is willing to sit in the tomb while it trusts in transformation. Easter is about faithful companions who keep watch with us and cheer us on as we wait for our inner resurrection.

From *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems and Reflections for Every Season* by Joyce Rupp

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**Prayer action suggestion:**

With whom do you maintain a ?tomb watch?? What is your hope? How can you broaden your watch in a way that will give hope to others? Begin doing it.



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