

Promise of new life the most joyous thing about Easter

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 8, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

Editor's note: This homily was given at an Easter vigil Mass on March 30.

Surely this is the longest liturgy of the Word that we have during our whole church year, and you might think it would be a merciful thing if there were no homily. But the book says that the celebrant is to give a homily, so we have to do something. It's certainly worth it to spend just a few moments reflecting on all that we have heard tonight, but especially on the Gospel lesson, which climaxes everything that has led up to it.

One thing to notice, of course, is how those disciples of Jesus -- these very faithful women and all of the other disciples, too, the ones who had fled and didn't stay with him right to the end like the women did -- to reflect on how none of them expected this. They were stunned when they came to the tomb and the body wasn't there. In Mark's Gospel, this account tells how the women were just so frightened, they ran away, and there's no account of their going to the disciples and telling them what they experienced, but eventually they did. So the women were the first ones to proclaim the good news about Jesus, the good news that he had actually told them about, as Luke says tonight, but they had somehow not taken that in, - that yes, he was to die, but that he would rise from the dead. It's such an extraordinary idea, and it's such an almost incomprehensible notion, that someone dies but comes to new life.

Now, even during his life, Jesus, at times, seemed to have doubted what was to happen to him. There's a passage in John's Gospel -- it comes during the last week of the life of Jesus, during Holy Week, after he has come into Jerusalem and is spending a day or two teaching the people. Some people come to him, trying to know who he is. The first thing (because this has to have been on his mind so much) he starts to tell them is about how the Son of Man has to be handed over to his enemies and be put to death. He says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. That is, to be put to death." Remember, Jesus was fully human like we are, so he was undoubtedly afraid, not knowing in a human way what this would mean.

That's when he tells the beautiful parable that we often use ourselves when we begin to wonder about death and life after death. It's a very simple and brief parable: "Truly I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much fruit." Jesus is talking about himself, when he is buried in the ground like the seed and dies, then he can break forth into new life, be raised from the dead and share that life with all of us.

That's the first and most joyful message of Easter -- that Jesus has, indeed, broken through the barrier of death to new life, and where he has gone, we will follow, go through death to new life as he did. This is the great joy of Easter, the great promise of Easter, that each of us, when we die, will be like the seed that breaks forth into new life. I think that we can see that as we look around the church -- the beautiful flowers, each of them was a seed that had to die and come to new life, so we can remember these flowers as a sign of our resurrection.

Not only is the resurrection about what is to happen to us in the future; it's also about what happens to us right now, and that's where St. Paul's letter to the Romans is so important. Each one of us was baptized; probably we weren't immersed fully into the water as the earliest Christians did, but that's what Paul is talking about when he

Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter
Genesis 1:1-2:2
Psalms 104:1-5, 10, 12
Isaiah 22:1-18
Psalms 10:5, 8, 9-10, 11
Exodus 14:15-15:1
Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18
Isaiah 54:5-14
Psalms 39:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
Isaiah 55:1-11
Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4
Psalms 19:8, 9, 10, 11
Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28
Psalms 42:3, 5, 43:3, 4
Isaiah 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6
Romans 6:3-11
Psalms 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Luke 24:1-12

[Full text of the readings \[1\]](#)

tells the church in Rome, "Don't you know that in baptism, which unites us to Christ, we are all baptized and plunged into his death." That's what happens at our baptism -- we're plunged into the death of Jesus, buried in that water of baptism.

"By this baptism and his death, we were buried with him, and as Jesus was raised from among the dead by the glory of God, so we begin living in a new life." It's right now, not just when we die, that we share in the risen life of Jesus. It's right now, through our baptism, that we become alive with the life of Jesus. That carries with it a responsibility, and I'm sure we all recognize what that means. We're alive in Jesus; Jesus lives in us, in each one of us. We're the ones who carry on the work of Jesus. We must begin to act according to the way of Jesus. We must continue to listen faithfully to the Word of God, proclaimed by Jesus, by how he lived and by what he said.

A very hopeful sign for us this Easter is Pope Francis. I think we all realize this: He's taking the words of the Gospel very literally, almost. Jesus called for simplicity of life; he's beginning to do that. Jesus called for the full equality of all persons and the fullness of dignity for every person. Pope Francis yesterday washed the feet of women, and that's something that was not supposed to be done, according to a rule that was promulgated a few years ago, but he did it because he understands that the way of Jesus is to recognize the full dignity and worth of every person.

He's also reaching across religious barriers. There was a Muslim in the group yesterday when he washed the feet of those in that jail, and he welcomed that person into that celebration, and that's what we must do. We must break down every barrier that separates us from any other person by reason of race or economic situation or religious differences. We must break down all of those barriers and begin to proclaim the good news of Jesus that God pours forth God's love on all and we who share in a very special way the life of God through Jesus must continue to spread that message of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the life of Jesus, everywhere in our world.

That's how we will live out what we celebrate tonight. We've been plunged into the death of Jesus in the waters of baptism. We have now risen to new life, and we will share that life in every part of the world where we can.

[Homily given at St. Anne, Frankfort, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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