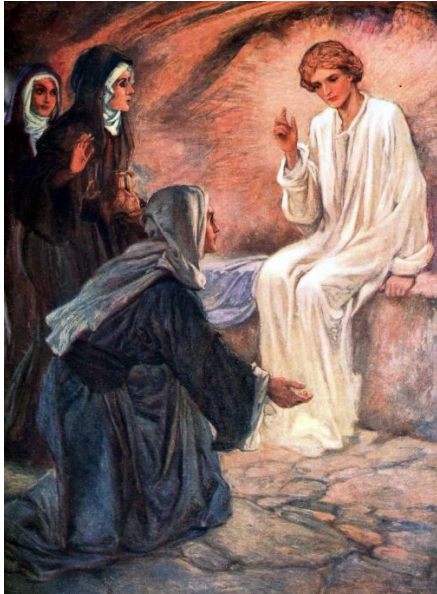


## Homily for April 3, 2021 (Easter Vigil)



This resurrection story is a story not only of Jesus being raised to new life, but more importantly, it is the story of the movement from fear to love in all of our lives. One thing the gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all have in common when they tell the resurrection story is the chronic mistake of people going to the wrong place. There is always someone in the wrong place telling them to go to the right place. They are lost in so many ways, and somebody has to redirect them. Mark's version starts off with women bringing spices to anoint Jesus' body. While it is an act of piety on one level, it is a terrible misunderstanding at a deeper level.

Remember, Jesus had previously told them, ***“I am the Resurrection and the Life,”*** and he meant it. Spices for a dead body is the first sign of their misunderstanding of who Jesus is. He is not someone who was once alive but now is dead. No! He is the Resurrection and the Life—always has been and always will be.

Let's turn to the text. ***Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.*** When we read these texts both literally and symbolically, what this is telling us is that Jesus is already risen. He is both with us and just a little bit ahead of us at all times. The first day of the week is straight out of the Book of Genesis. The first day of the week is when creation began; with Jesus' resurrection, everything is beginning again.

The women were saying to each other as they went along, ***“Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”*** In their minds, Jesus is dead and they are alive. And they want to know who can remove the stone that blocks the living from the dead. Who can do that? Who can reunite us? ***When they looked up they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled back.*** I think in our minds we believe, falsely, that the barrier between us and our loved ones who have died, is like a huge, immovable rock. Here it is helpful to remember Jesus' words from the cross when he cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”*** It does not mean Jesus has been abandoned by God. God abandons no one. What it does mean is that the power of love has entered into the center of

abandonment. From here on in, every tomb is inhabited by the power of God's love, including Jesus' tomb and your tomb when you die. There is no place, including hell itself, that the power of love does not have access to.

***As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe.*** When you read Mark's gospel mystically and symbolically, you can make the connection between this guy and the stalker in the Garden of Gethsemane. The stalker is the man who was full of bravado, at least on the surface. He shows up in the Garden of Gethsemane, and in his mind he is going to die with Jesus. We know this by the fact that he shows up at Jesus' arrest wearing a burial shroud. He's got an ego trip going on about dying with his master. They grab him ripping the shroud off him. So now, he's looking for a coat. Guess what? He finds one. In the empty tomb he is dressed in a white robe, the Christian symbol of baptism and of new life. He is no longer running from death. There is no fear in him whatsoever. He is sitting calmly in the emptiness of death wrapped in a divine love that inhabits even tombs.

I admire people who can look at their addiction squarely in the face and say, "I'm not running from this anymore." I admire people who face a struggle in their marriage straight on with honest and open communication instead of running from it. I admire people who are living with a terminal illness and those who are accompanying them; these are the ones who are sitting in the middle of death, wearing a white robe, and announcing life. The gospel stalker, who once ran in fear of death, now sits in the emptiness of death saying as St. Paul said, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Is that all you got?"

Back to the story. ***On entering the tomb, the women were amazed. The young man in the white robe said to them, "Do not be amazed."*** Amazement in the gospels is always a sign of low spiritual development; it means you don't get it. The point is not to be amazed. The point is to see. We know this because in the very next line, the man in the white robe continues, ***"You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."*** Are you looking for the crucified one who cried the prayer of abandonment, and in doing so brought God's victorious love to all the abandoned people of the earth and even to tombs? That one? You're looking for him? ***"He's not here. He has been raised.*** You're in the wrong place."

Now you've got to go to the right place. ***"Go tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee."*** I always thought Peter was one of the disciples. He

is, but he is also being singled out. Some people think that it is because he is the head of the church, but I don't think that is what this is about. Remember the mounting fear in Peter when he was asked three times whether he was associated with Jesus and he cursed and swore, **"I do not know the man!"** The cock crowed twice and Peter became fear itself. So, this young man in white is telling the women at the tomb, "Go tell the disciples and the guy who doesn't know me that the guy he doesn't know is going before him to Galilee." Do you see how much Jesus loves Peter? Jesus is both with us and at the same time just a little bit ahead of us. He has already gone ahead of Peter to Galilee. Jesus always pays it forward. But why Galilee? Because Galilee is where Jesus' entire mission began. Galilee is the place where Jesus said to Peter, "Come follow me." And leaving his nets behind, and leaving his fear behind, Peter did follow Jesus. Jesus is going back to Galilee to start everything all over again. In Galilee Peter gets a fresh start. This is the creation story anew. Without ever bringing up Peter's failings or his denials, Jesus will invite Peter to leave the house of fear and enter the house of love once again.

The gospel of Mark ends with, **"The women fled the tomb for fear and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."** Actually, there are 12 more verses tacked on to the end of Mark's gospel that you will find in your Bible. However, scholars are certain Mark did not write them. What Mark did end his gospel with are women running in fear and telling no one. Fear always makes you run, and fear makes you bite your tongue and tell no one.

Mark's gospel begins with: **Here is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God.** Nowhere does it say: Here is the *end* of the Good New of Jesus Christ, Son of God. So, while the women fled in fear and silence, something, eventually, must have broke inside of them. What broke was their fear. They could not, not speak about it. If they had not able to overcome their fear, we would not be here tonight.

The real ending of Mark's gospel is so genuine, so honest, so spot on. It tells us that fear will always be with us, even within the most courageous among us. Fear and love are always going to be mixed together, but fear is not going to be final. It wasn't final for the stalker. It wasn't final for Peter. It wasn't final for the women at the tomb, and it won't be final for you.

**Fr. Phil**