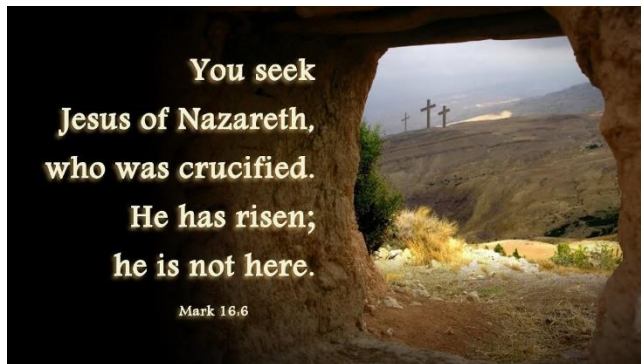


Homily – March 30th, 2024 – Easter Vigil



Each of the four gospel writers tell the resurrection story from a slightly different angle. The resurrection story could be told from 100 different viewpoints, and they would all add another layer of richness. Mark's version has three women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus.

They are not the first to take up the task of anointing Jesus. On Palm Sunday we heard about a woman who broke open and poured, in a lavish way, costly ointment on Jesus. When she was scolded for spending money on ointment rather than giving the money to the poor, Jesus defended her saying, ***"Leave her alone...She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial."*** This woman knows something maybe nobody else knows. She knows that Jesus must die. His death and burial are not a diversion or a disruption from his mission; his death and burial are central to his mission. Whenever Jesus previously talked about going to Jerusalem and laying down his life, the disciples either changed the subject or tried to convince him not to go. This woman's action provided Jesus with something he often looked for but rarely found—understanding. She understood his mission; the others did not. She is on Jesus' wavelength. So impressed is Jesus that he said of her, ***"Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her"*** (Mk. 14:9).

This woman understands the first part of Jesus' mission, that must suffer, die and be buried. However, Jesus' mission will be incomplete if dying does not also include rising to new life. Dying and rising is not only the plan for Jesus' life but is also the pattern of every person who claims to be his follower. It's the pattern of our lives.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, these three women at the tomb, are learning what it means to be disciples of Christ. Although they didn't flee like the Apostles during the arrest, trial, execution and burial, they nevertheless think it's all over. With spices in tow, they expect to find a dead body and nothing else. Their discipleship needs some development. None of us becomes a disciple overnight or just because we have the water of baptism

poured over us. It takes time, in fact, our entire life to become a disciple of Christ. This story of the three women visiting the tomb is more a story of discipleship than it is a story of the risen Lord. They ask each other a very practical question, **“Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”** As neophytes, newbies to discipleship, what they are really asking is, “Who will teach us how to enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus? Who will teach us to be buried with Christ so that we can also rise with him?”

We are not born Christian; we are made into Christians by apprenticing ourselves to people who are a little further along the path than we are. We need guides and mentors whom we can trust. These three women, like our elect, Joshua, and anyone else who has journeyed through the R.C.I.A. process, are longing to have access to Jesus. Help comes to these three women. Not only did they notice the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb but on entering it, they found a young man dressed in white sitting on the right side. Again, go back to Mark’s Passion account we heard last Sunday. In the arrest scene, in the Garden of Gethsemane, a young man appears there wearing nothing but a linen cloth. The linen cloth is the symbol of his desire to follow Jesus into suffering and even into death. However, his bravado falls quickly when the arresting party showed up. They grab at the linen garment and he runs off naked. If this young man in the linen garment had persevered, he would have become the young man in the robe at the empty tomb. He would have known the connection between death, burial, and resurrection.

The young man in the tomb is a catechist, you might say, and a very good one . He has lived through death, and so he can confidently proclaim resurrection. The three women were alarmed, and in that kind of state, they are less likely to hear and understand what this young man has to say. So, he tells them, **“Do not be alarmed. I’m here to help you with your search.”** He knows that these women are **looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.** They have the first part of the mystery, the dying part down pat, but they don’t yet have the second part—the resurrection. The crucified one is not in the tomb. The young man urges the women to not only believe *his* word but to see for *themselves*. Discovering things for ourselves, with the help of guides along the way, is essential for making faith our own. The young man tells them, **“He has been raised; he is not here. Look, for yourselves, there is the place they laid him.”**

But if Jesus is not in the tomb, where is he? The young man is a good catechist. He doesn't give answers, but he puts these women, these seekers, on a journey. Where is Jesus? He is in the place where he told them he would meet them. Go back again to last Sunday, Mark's Passion account. At the Last Supper Jesus said, **"You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I'm raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."** This is what the young man in white tells the three women, "Go tell the disciples and Peter, the guy who said three times that he didn't have a clue who Jesus was, that **Jesus goes ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.**" Why Galilee? It was in Galilee where Jesus first called his disciples. Galilee was the place of the original preaching, teaching, and healing. In Galilee the disciples first began to follow Jesus. The following of Jesus is not over. It is beginning again. This time, when you go back to Galilee, you return with a greater understanding of what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection makes possible in your life and in the life of every person who sincerely seeks him.

Rising from the dead isn't just about victory and glory. It's about Jesus' continual engagement with the world. His work isn't over and neither is the work of any of us who dare to call ourselves his disciples. We are still apprenticing, aren't we?

The women fled the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. That would be a bizarre ending if it were in fact the end. It's not the end. The invitation to return to Galilee is issued to us over and over again. As these women grew in discipleship fear and silence, little by little, gave way to courage and speaking out. Otherwise there would be no Christian community. Otherwise the sheep would still be scattered. Otherwise where did the young man in the robe come from? Otherwise the story of the women at the empty tomb would never have become public knowledge.

Joshua, may courage override every terror in your life. Set your face into the wind and take up your cross. The R.C.I.A. process will eventually come to an end, just like the Gospel of Mark comes to an end. But it will not be the end of God's plan for you. Like the young man in the tomb, God will provide you with other guides. Galilee awaits you. Go and do great things.

~Fr. Phil