

Easter Day 2020 (April 12)

Year A RCL

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

“This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” *Psalm 118:23*

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

On this Sunday, we celebrate Easter, the fundamental celebration for Christians worldwide, where we recognize in the resurrection of Jesus the infinite presence of God with us forever. This feast has come to us in the middle of a pandemic which makes the panorama outside of our homes unsafe and potentially risky for our own health and those around us.

Many are questioning, what kind of Easter is this? with non-essential business, parks and recreational centers closed, airports working at a minimal, churches, schools, and even doctors' appointments streaming on social platforms. Is it possible to celebrate at this present time? Some say, this does not look like Easter at all.

In pondering these comments, and also the comments of those who complain about being bored or tired of being at home, and those eager to return to their business, to school, and even to church, I began to think of Easter like never before. My pondering took me to realize Easter is a valuation of death and life. Easter is what many are living in hospitals across the globe. Easter is

happening in families where illness, unemployment, and severe adversities have forced them into the tombs of despair and anguish.

For many years, the consumeristic society had changed the meaning of Easter to associate it with personal or social experiences that normally gratify our senses like: an elaborate Easter brunch, Easter egg hunt, Easter baskets, Easter vacation, Easter bunny...etc. These cultural expressions of the religious beliefs in our society are not to be condemned or mesmerize, but in reality have very little to do with the perplexity, amazement, contradictions, and the life and death that all four Gospels describe in the narratives of the resurrection.

In reading these Gospels of the resurrection, the external manifestations of Easter seem insufficient to fully describe what Easter is in relationship to new life. This year is absolutely a different Easter, I totally agree. The silence of our cities and the restriction to be safe at home has placed in us all a new meaning to life. After all, how can a Christian member of the Body of Christ celebrate Easter like normal when more than 100, 000 people have died around the world from the same disease? Is it possible to ignore the cry or the pain of those who are dying around us?

Still, with the discomfort and presence of death in the midst of us, the Gospel of Easter shows with the resurrection, the rays of hope which only the empty tomb of Jesus can display. As a reminder, death does not have the last word, nor does tragedy or destiny, only God is in control of all human life.

Easter 2020 is unique in that it has obliged all humanity to be grateful for the simple fact of being alive. It has exposed publicly that the act of breathing privately is a reminder of the presence of the Spirit of Life that neither science nor medicine can regulate. Easter 2020 is unique in showing how all countries, races, and languages are knit together and interdependent of each other. In these difficult days, you hear people recognizing and proclaiming as a slogan of hope, “we are all in this together”.

In reading today’s Gospel, you notice John’s description of the resurrection that begins in this way, “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark”. It is there when, “it was still dark”, that the breaking of the early dawn that new life passes through. Only in darkness is it possible to see the light, Mary Magdalen who was present at Jesus’ crucifixion and death (John 19:25) becomes a prophet of the resurrection and light.

The resurrection of Jesus is a movement, an action, a passing from death to life. When Mary Magdalen saw the stone removed from the tomb, she ran to

tell the chosen disciples in John's Gospel, "Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" what she saw; and their reaction is also to run towards the tomb.

It is contradictory to remain still, God's new life force us to go out the tomb. I see this new life of Easter on the indefatigable action of medical staff, first responders, grocery store and sanitation workers, city, county, state, and federal leaders and all those who are working for the good of others.

Even so, resurrection happens different in each person. The beloved disciple saw and believed; and Peter entered into the tomb, saw the linen wrappings and returned in silence, perhaps full of inquiries. amazement and confusion trying to rationalize what happened? Mary Magdalen does not return home; she needs more time to process this news of the empty tomb and the missing body of Jesus. Her grief and sorrow are so intense that she is unable to take her mind away from death. Like many families in these days, it is challenging to think something different when death is all around.

Jesus the risen Lord is there, close to her, just as He is with us and with those who suffer today. *"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"* She continues ignoring the presence of Jesus until the Lord called her by

name. After experiencing the new life in Jesus' voice, her crying immediately transforms into joy, she runs again to announce, "I have seen the Lord".

Indeed, this Easter 2020 is not our regular celebration of the resurrection.

Even with social distancing and without all the regular activities, this Easter in my opinion is more profound and personal; we have been given more time to reflect on our own mortality and spiritual life. God wants to encounter all His children changed, in the same manner as Mary Magdalen, while it was still dark and amid her crying.

Today on Easter day, we can have the same feelings of confusion and bewilderment that accompanied Mary Magdalen or Peter when they saw the stone removed or the body of Jesus missing. Our lack of explanation, the mingle with death, or the failure to believe, does not stop the Author of Life to show that He lives eternally.

Trust in God's mercy. Easter 2020 is in fact the victory of life over death: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Psalm 118:23. Amen.