

Easter Vigil (C)

St. Thomas Aquinas, Camas April 10, 2004

## **We Don't Have To Be the People We've Been**

In life we are on a constant search for more. Men and women everywhere are hungry and thirsty, voraciously yearning and seeking: rich and poor, wise and foolish, young and old, literate and illiterate, saints and sinners, atheists and agnostics, playboys and prostitutes. Some can explain their inner emptiness in words; most cannot, but everyone experiences it. That inner ache drives all our dreams, desires, and decisions – good and bad ... Our abiding hunger for more than we presently experience does not have to be proved but only explained (Dubay, 13). Looking around in life we see it happening: songs, poems, Xtreme sports. Life as it is, is unsatisfying. We are discontent with life and ourselves. We look around at the world man has created, and we know deep down that this is not the way things should be; this is not the way people should be.

But the frustration and tragedy of life comes from the realization of our own inability to change ourselves, let alone the world. The older we get, we either become more adept at keeping our minds off of this frustration, or our hearts begin to become poisoned by bitter resignation. We know deep down that we have not yet become the men and women we're supposed to be, and that life is not what it is supposed to be. No matter how many self help books we read, no matter how many causes we join, and no matter how many trips to the gym we've taken, we can't seem to avoid the futility of it all.

Tonight (Today) in the mystery of Easter we discover the truth that we don't have to be the people we've been, and that our deepest hunger and desire way can be fulfilled beyond imagining. This truth does not originate within ourselves or in this world, but is proclaimed from an empty tomb. He is not here, but he has been raised. **Jesus Christ is Risen!**

It is only in the intimate encounter with the risen Christ that accomplishes it. We don't have to be the people we've been. Life can change; we can change because He has changed. The crucified Lord is now risen, and we behold Jesus' glorified body bursting with the Divine Life. He invites us to share in this new life. This invitation is extended to every single person in the world, no matter what they've done. As St. John Vianney said, "Not all the saints started well, but they all ended well." And as Cardinal Nguyen Van Thun said, "Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future." The saints show us again and again that our transformation comes through the intimate encounter and communion with Jesus.

So after the Resurrection, the question of life shifts from *what* to *who* :from asking what can truly satisfy and change our hearts and our world for the better, to asking where can I meet this Risen Lord? To meet Him we have to look in a radically new way,

like the women. The two angels told the bewildered women not to seek the living one among the dead.

In Genesis we learn how the Lord first created man in His image and likeness, and how man disfigured that image through sin. In the Resurrection man is re-created in Christ the new Adam, fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy that the Lord would take from us our stony hearts and give us a new heart. The Resurrection is on the first day of the week, "not only because it's Sunday, but also the first day of new creation. Our task then is to follow the new Adam in His command to take up our cross and walk with Him through Calvary to His Resurrection. St. Paul says, "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. "

So we must unite ourselves to Jesus in his death. We really do have to die. These words are not just a nice image or clever metaphor. Some of us are willing to change a little, and get rid of some of our bad habits, but there is nothing lukewarm or half-hearted about the God of Revelation. He is always radical and total. Never does He reduce to fractions what He expects of us. Our communion with Him is to become a blazing fire. This is how the change happens – our old, sinful selves are consumed in the flames of His love. Our sinful selves must be crucified and die with Him, then because we are united to him in death we will be raised up with him. Therefore, this intimate encounter is not to be confused with a constant euphoria or high in following Jesus. The intimate encounter means then that we share everything in Jesus' life, even sometimes feeling His desolation, His abandonment, and sharing in His Passion. Without the death there is no Resurrection. In other words, everything in life is to be a walking with Christ. Life, our lives, all human striving and activity must be ordered toward communion with Him to the acceptance of his words, teaching, following his example of love and mercy, and especially in the communion with him on Calvary. Nothing else will work; nothing else will fix this world. There is no other way to be re-created.

The *London Times* once ran a series of essays by famous English writers all addressing a simple question: "What is wrong with the world today?" Each author took his turn in erudite and literary fashion. The shortest and most profound essay came from the Catholic author, G.K. Chesterton, who wrote simply, "Dear Sirs, What is wrong with the world today? I am. Sincerely G.K. Chesterton. What's wrong with the world today? I am. You are. But most of us would have a hard time admitting it. The 'I am' which is what's wrong with the world, is our sinful selves held in slavery to sin and in bondage to death.

But the Risen Christ says to all of us, "I did not create you to be the problem in this world. He comes to us mired as we are in sin and death and says, "I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. For I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated" (Office

of Readings, 497). Our catechumens on this night respond to that call. The rest of us are renewing our response. Intimate communion with the Risen Christ changes everything.

We now stand in this intimate encounter – having died and buried ourselves in his death and burial, He raised us up and gives us a share in His own Body and Blood – the fruits of His Resurrection, the food of immortality. A more intimate encounter with the Risen Christ could not be imagined. By His death He sacrificed His Body and poured out His Blood. By His Resurrection He offers that divine gift to us.

The remedy for this diseased world, and the fulfillment of our heart's greatest longing, is here present on this altar. We don't have to be the people we've been. The Risen Lord is here, and intimate communion with Him changes everything.

- *Frs. Derek Lappe and John Cihak*

**Sources:**

Dubay, Thomas. *Prayer Primer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002).  
Roman Breviary, Vol. II.