

Homily for April 24, 2011 (Easter Sunday)

*Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118 (v.v.); Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10*

April Snow, Easter Promise

Last Monday morning, at around ten o'clock, I found myself staring out the window of my office in Detroit both dumbfounded and depressed. The city was in the middle of a snowstorm: visibility was very limited; and although the snow melted as soon as it hit the streets it piled up pretty quickly on the grass, rooftops and cars. The calendar said April 18, but it might as well have been January or February. I sighed and complained to another person in our office: "Man, this just isn't right!"

By four o'clock that same afternoon, I found myself again looking out another window; and again I was amazed. What was once a sea of white only hours before had returned to the familiar brown, green, and grey of early spring. The only evidence of our morning mini-blizzard was a few errant patches of snow, generally in the low or shaded areas.

Of course April snowstorms, even heavy ones, are not that unusual in this part of the country. But unlike their wintry cousins, they are pretty ephemeral. They bludgeon us with a sobering reminder that the cold and darkness of winter can be reluctant to loose their grip; but they can also comfort us with the knowledge that, "This, too, shall pass," and we will inevitably experience the light, warmth, and promise of spring. April showers *do* bring May flowers, even when those showers are of snow rather than rain.

Day follows night and darkness leads to light. A preface that we often use for funerals reminds us: *In him, who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned. The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.*

That's what we celebrate at Easter. That was the good news that St. Peter proclaimed to Cornelius and his household in our first reading. That's what Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" ("Mary, the mother of James and Joseph," Matthew 27:56), who had both seen Jesus die on the cross, experienced when they came to see the tomb. That's what spurs us to follow St. Paul's exhortation in our second reading: "Think of what is above, not of what is on earth." That's why we can join the author of Psalm 118 in singing: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!"

But just like the promise of spring in the midst of an April snowstorm, it isn't always easy to see. We live in a world rent by violence—from the politically-driven streets of Abidjan and Tripoli to the drug wars on the streets in Tijuana and Phoenix, and from the overheated rhetoric and ideologically-driven combat that characterizes so much of the work of our elected officials. From Wall Street and Washington to Beijing and Delhi to Harare and Havana the strong abuse and exploit the weak, and the innocent, like Christ, suffer and sometimes die.

Much closer to home, many families know their own crosses: unemployment, foreclosure, addiction, terminal diseases, and various forms of abuse. The Church, too, suffers from the weakness and sinfulness of her members. Our words and deeds can drive people away from Christ rather than to draw them to him. Like the two Mary's, we often find ourselves facing the tomb, overwhelmed by our own powerlessness, and facing darkness and death in its many forms.

It's precisely in those times that we are invited not to remember what those two women could not know: death and darkness is not the end of the story. It's in those times that we need to still ourselves enough to hear the voices of the angel and of the risen Christ himself echoing through the centuries: "Do not be afraid!" It's in those times that we are challenged to look within and around us for the signs of life that are already in our midst: those who work for peace and achieve it not through force but through love; those who strive for justice; those who act as vessels of God's healing grace; and those who overcome their abuse and realize a new strength. The cross is real; but so is the empty tomb. Happy Easter!+