

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 1st 2016

By celebrating the event of Easter intensely for eight days and then steadily for a week of weeks (49 days) the Church wants to enable us to appreciate the infinite wonder that Easter represents in our Faith. It is through the Paschal Mystery – Jesus’ death and Resurrection – that his Incarnation, and therefore his Mission, is made perfect. St. Ignatius of Loyola was convinced that the way to enter this mystery through God’s grace is to practice of form of imaginative prayer that is especially suited to these wonderful stories of post Easter appearance.

Today I invite you to consider with me what Peter might have been going through those first days after the Passover when Jesus died. The confusing welter of grief, anger, unimaginable loss . . . and the guilt – oh terrible guilt he must have felt. There were reports by now. Reports by witnesses he trusts, that Jesus has encountered them. Jesus is alive. Peter himself had seen the empty tomb and heard the report of the women that they had seen him. But Jesus hadn’t come to Peter . . . and. . . Maybe he wouldn’t – after all Peter had denied that he even knew him – much less that he was friend. . . Maybe Peter didn’t want him to come . . . what if he did see him . . . but what if he didn’t?

But . . . he could not get that look that Jesus turned on him in the Pretorium . . . the slightly crooked smile and the kindness . . . the love that said . . . what? I don’t hate you? I understand? I love you anyway?

Silently I huddle in the corner of Peter’s heart and hear his anguished weeping . . . his shouts to the stars late at night. I feel the fear . . . fear that Jesus is alive and he will have to face him . . . and fear that he isn’t but it is all a fantasy of his grief crazed companions.

Peter feels stifled in Jerusalem. He can’t stand the gossip . . . the fear that so many seem to be carrying around . . . all he can think about is his own failure. He denied that he even knew Him – his closest friend. Just a few hours before he had protested that he would die for Jesus and then . . . and then, he SWORE he didn’t know him – called God to witness his lies and betrayal. What had possessed him to be such a fool.

Lurching to his feet late in the night he announces he’s leaving for Galilee – he is going home . . . to fish. Maybe he can take his mind off this craziness he is trapped in. He smells the night air, feels the breeze coming in off the lake, throws the nets in the lake. . .

But then there is nothing . . . he can't even fish any more . . . it's as if everything is taken – everything is gone. His wife won't look at him, his sons and nephew throw contemptuous furtive looks – he can hear their voices in his heart echoing his WHY? WHY did you tell them you didn't even know him?

In frustration he pulls the nets in and swings the tiller toward the shore. Suddenly they hear the voice they were all longing to hear – “throw the nets on the other side.” . . . Are you CRAZY? We fished all the good fishing hours of dark – and caught nothing? What does it mean to put the net on the other side – it'll get tangled and torn . . . this is mad . . . but he can't resist the “what if . . .?” So they throw the nets over the side yet again and suddenly their arms are nearly pulled from their sockets with the weight of the load of fish.

OH MY GOD . . . it is Jesus! Without thought Peter tightens the clout around his loins and jumps into the water – swims this time – no storm to pile up waves – and no arrogance to think he can walk on it – but with a strong stroke he races to the shore. What will Jesus say? What will He demand? It suddenly doesn't matter . . . all that matters is that it IS Jesus and He is ALIVE. As Peter drags himself ashore and faces the one he loves but has failed, he is utterly blinded by the LOOK . . . the gaze of Love. Time stops . . . his heart, and mine as well, seem to lurch. That gaze of love, . . .

THAT is Easter!

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