

Homily Easter April 1, 2018

St. Paul says: “No eye can see; no ear can hear; no mind can comprehend the good and beautiful things that God has prepared for those who love him.” No ear can hear, no eye can see, no mind can comprehend the beauty of God’s future.

“There are some times in life when the word, “surprise,” is not strong enough. You need to find stronger words than the word, surprised. You need words like astounded, astonished, amazed and awestruck, dazzled and dumbfounded. There are many times in life when the word, surprise, is not strong enough. I would like to illustrate this.” (Sermons.com*)

“It was 1971. The Viet Nam war was back in the news again. It seemed like it never left. A shell came in and exploded a young man’s body. The only thing left were his dog tags. They sent those nametags, those dog tags, back home to his mom and dad, where they held a service to grieve for their son. Their only child had been killed. They wanted to have more children but they couldn’t, and now their only child was gone, and they couldn’t come to terms with it, especially since there was no body. Shortly thereafter the war ended, and the soldiers started to come home and the prisoners of war started to return. One day, the telephone rang; the mother picked it up, and the voice said: “Mother, it’s your son.” Her heart stopped. She was breathless. She was astonished and amazed, “Is this some kind of cruel joke?” she asked? “Is this some kind of a hoax?” “No. This is your son. I have been a prisoner of war, and have just been released. I am calling to tell you that I am alive.” There are certain times in life when the word, surprised, is not enough. You need bigger words. You need words like astonished, astounded, awestruck, amazed. You need words like dumbfounded and dazzled.” (Sermons.com)

This veteran’s family accepted death so the shock of their son coming back to life was beyond words. It seems to me that after the crucifixion despite all they had been told the followers of Jesus had accepted death.

Mary Magdalene had heard Jesus say: “I am the resurrection and the life.” She had seen Lazarus whom Jesus raised. She had heard Jesus prophecy that he would be killed and after three days come to life. But what is Mary Magdalene and the other women going to the tomb for? Are they going to see Jesus raised? No! Just like the family of that Vietnam Veteran they had all been to the cross. Something happens to human beings when they are confronted with unspeakable suffering and death. These women accepted the fact that Jesus was dead despite all they had seen. They were acting as if all that he said was too far from reality to be fully grasped. They went to the tomb prepared not to greet the Risen Lord but a decaying corpse.

“Mary,” the man in the garden says. She knew the voice. It was Jesus. “Rabboni,” Mary responds. It is Jesus. Jesus is raised. He is standing there right in front of her in the garden. You need stronger words than surprised here. You need words like astounded. Astonished, amazed and awestruck. Mary rushes back to tell the apostles. What are they doing? Are they gathered as friends anticipating a surprise birthday party ready to jump and greet the Risen Lord? No! They are hiding away behind locked doors. But it is the third day! They heard Jesus Luke 9:22 *“The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”*

Right from the lips of Jesus they had heard this prophecy. But once again these men had seen the crucifixion. Something happens to us when we see a loved one suffer and die. Certainty vanishes. Shadows settle in. The night of the soul comes upon us. They saw with their own eyes his ravaged body slowly inch the cross to Golgotha. They saw him suffocate. They are not waiting for Jesus to rise. No, they are NOT waiting for him to rise. They are waiting for a chance to get out of town.

Mary appears at the door. “I have seen the Lord she announced. Peter and John run as fast as they could

to the burial crypt. Young John arrives first and then older Peter. Peter walked into the crypt first and John followed. There was the linen shroud and the napkin that had covered Jesus face all neatly folded and sitting there. The disciples must have looked at each other and I know their reaction. They were astonished and astounded, amazed and awestruck, dazzled and dumbfounded.

They tell Thomas. Thomas says: “Unless I touch the wounds in his hands and the wound in his side, I will not believe.” Days pass and there He is Jesus standing before him. Jesus said, “Touch my hands. Touch my side.” And what was Thomas’s reaction? I know. He was astonished and astounded amazed and awestruck, dazzled and dumbfounded.

I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Living Son of Almighty God and what he spoke is truth. There is life beyond the grave. This world is passing away and everything in it will one day be destroyed. The only sure thing to hold onto is Christ. Christ is the Way. Christ is the truth. Christ is the life.

Yes, of course you have doubts. If the apostles had doubts even after they lived with Jesus three years day and night we are entitled to have doubts. Those doubts may even follow you to the grave. You have been to Golgotha. You have stood at the bedsides of loved ones and watched them suffer. Something happens to us when we witness the crucifixion of people we love. There are shadows of insecurity which weep into our hearts when we witness unspeakable suffering. The apostles knew this and so do you. But I have news for you. After you take your last breathe and close your eyes in death you shall open them. Stunned. Shocked. Awestruck by the beauty of what you see. For as St. Paul told us: “Eye has not seen ear has not heard nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him.” Jesus Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!!!

Amen

** There was a feature sermon on sermons.com the weekend before Easter which gave me a basic outline and some of the script for this homily, but, when I went back on April 8th to find the source to give credit it had been refiled in their library with thousands of sermons. I was unable to locate the sermon of origin for these thoughts. I have added quotes where I definitely know I’ve taken words “almost” word for word from the original sermon which was much longer.*