

EASTER VIGIL & EASTER SUNDAY; Cycle-A; April 9th 2023
Gospel Matthew 1-10; John 20:1-9

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Once, a ten year old boy got interested in reading the Bible and he started with one of the gospels. He went on for quite some time and finally he reached the account of the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus. He became so sad and ran to his mother and cried out, ***“They killed him! They killed him!”*** The mother took a moment to comprehend what he was talking about. Then she said to him, ‘go and read the rest of the account.’ And after some time the boy came back and exclaimed, ***“It is awesome! It is awesome!”*** Yes, the disciples became sad and disappointed with the same feeling of that boy, ***“They killed him”*** and they fled to save their lives. They too took a while to read the rest of the account and believe that Jesus is rose from the dead. The pious women and the disciples were amazed and perhaps cried out, **‘He is risen and living! It is awesome!’** On Good Friday, hearing the long Passion narrative, we too left the Church filled with mixed feelings. But this evening/Sunday morning, after forty six days we are singing **‘Alleluia!’** Today we too can join the Psalmist and sing, **“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.” (Ps. 118:24).**

The incidents of disciples’ fleeing at the arrest of Jesus, the denial of Peter to admit that he was one of Jesus’ disciples, the desperate end of Judas Iscariot, the wailing of the pious women including Mother Mary, speak loudly that none of them believed that Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day. According to the synoptic gospels, the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the disciples did not follow Jesus on his way to Calvary nor did they stand at the foot of the cross. Only a handful of pious women were there with him till the end. But according to John’s gospel John was the only disciple who stood at the foot of the cross with Mother Mary and the pious women. And also according to the accounts of the synoptic gospels when Jesus was buried, it was already evening and the Sabbath had just begun. So Joseph of Arimathea and pious women could not anoint the body with spices, customary to that time. In Matthew’s gospel we read that on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. But he does not say anything about the intention of their visit. But if we take the Passion narratives of Mark and Luke we come to know that the pious women came with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. It was the belief of Jews that after the death of a person the soul would remain in the body for three days and only the fourth day it would leave the body and then the body would begin to decay. So it gives sense in their decision to anoint the body on the third day. As we read in the synoptic gospels the good news of the resurrection of Jesus was announced by an angel. Whereas according to John Mary Magdalene alone reached the tomb early in the morning and found the empty tomb and ran to inform Peter

and John. Later Jesus appeared to the pious women according to Matthew and as John writes he appeared to Mary Magdalene alone on the same day. **Their amazement and surprise show that the rising of Jesus from the dead was the least expected reality.**

Even after seeing the risen Lord, the apostles doubted the reality of resurrection and it didn't give them much hope ahead. That is why even after meeting the risen Lord three times Peter decided to go back to his old career of fishing. (John 21). The great truth of resurrection sunk into the hearts of disciples very slowly. In other words only with the Pentecost they became mature in their faith and started speaking in open the great event of the resurrection. Perhaps, St. Paul's faith in the resurrection should be esteemed as he believed it firmly even without seeing the risen Christ once. On his way to Damascus Paul heard only the voice of Jesus. But he believed that Jesus rose from the dead. The whole teaching of Paul is centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul accuses the unbelief of some of the Corinthians in the resurrection of Jesus. He says, **"And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too your faith."** (1 Cor. 15: 14). Paul could see our resurrection in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. In the same chapter in verses 16-18 Paul says, **"For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."** As Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus gives us a taste of what our future will be in God. In the letter to the Romans 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."**

During the long period of 2000 years the Church has been split into thousands of small fragments and the leadership; rules and regulations are varied from denomination to denomination. But amazingly enough, the basic belief that **"Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again"** remains the same in all churches which is the foundation or the core of our faith. We will have life only when we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. **Many founders of religions are dead and gone forever; but Jesus Christ lived, lives and will live till the end of the world.** In St. Matthew's gospel the last words of Christ to his apostles were, **"And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."** (Mt. 28:20b). **Only Jesus Christ could claim that.** In all generations the Christians found their strength in Jesus in their adverse situations; for they believed and believe that Jesus is risen from the dead and he is alive among us.