



The Inclusive Community

Easter Vigil

Holy Saturday

April 23, 2011

Easter Vigil Gospel: John 19:38-42; 20: 1-2, 14-18

Homily of Rev. Dr. Anthony T. Padovano

The most striking feature of the Easter accounts is their incredible intimacy. In a sense, the last public events in the story of Jesus are his death on the cross and his burial. These are attested to officially by Roman soldiers and by Pilate. They are accessible to people at large. Jesus is still a public figure. Those who wanted to meet him knew where to find him. A Roman centurion, a Syro-Phoenician woman, a tax collector in a sycamore tree, hostile Pharisees, Nicodemus who visits him at night – people knew how to locate him. He was at the disposal of people, ready to console or debate those who sought him.

He dies in public view of passers-by and he is buried in a tomb carefully identified and not difficult to discover.

That is the end of the public career of Jesus. There are no biographical details to add. Jesus of Nazareth is not seen again by the public after Calvary and after the tomb.

Easter is the first day in the non-public life of Christ. There is no easy way to find Christ now. Everything becomes intimate and provisional. All of a sudden, he is there. Just as quickly he is gone.

John's Gospel focuses more than the others on the intimacy of the Risen Christ. John began that theme in his account of the Last Supper. In John, this is not a Passover meal with the public ritual of breaking bread and offering wine. John does not record the formal and official words of the Eucharist: "This is my body...This is my blood."

John's Last Supper is intimate. Only in John does Jesus wash the feet of the disciples. Only in John does he speak of not leaving the disciples orphans and of loving one

another as he had loved them. In John, the public sign of the presence of Christ will not be miracles or healings or even memories as such. John has Jesus say, only John states this, that people will know you are my disciples by the love you have for one another. The sign of the presence of Christ will not be sacraments or rituals or the public preaching or doctrine of the Church. It will not even be the New Testament and how it is put together. In John, the public sign of the presence of Christ will be the intimate, personal, caring way we love one another. The power of the Risen Christ in John is the power of love – a love so intimate that feet are washed and heart-breaking words of farewell and hope are shared.

This intimacy is the hallmark of the Easter stories. Christ appears only to friends and speaks only to disciples. It will be the love of the disciples and their hope which sets the stage and paints the scene of the Easter appearances.

The way Jesus is buried in John is tender. John is the only Gospel writer who says the body of Jesus was anointed as he was buried. When Magdalene comes on Easter morning to the tomb, in John, only in John, it is not to anoint the buried Jesus. It is out of an intimate need to be near the tomb of someone she loved.

As Jesus is buried in John, his feet are washed and anointed. The Last Supper ritual of washing feet is completed. Indeed, John says, the body of Jesus is wrapped in linen and in a hundred pounds of myrrh and spices. The sun may be setting as Jesus is buried but the disciples find time for the intimate ritual of farewell.

Easter, in John, begins with a woman, Mary Magdalene, at the tomb. Women will have a special place in the new community. Women are the primary signs and sacraments of intimacy in the human family. There is nothing more intimate than pregnancy – a new life developing week by week in a woman's body. There is nothing more intimate than feeding an infant with one's own body. Mary, the mother of Jesus, will do this for him. Therefore, she will become the most honored and celebrated of all the disciples of Christ.

Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb on Easter morning for an intimate and personal visit. She is prepared to believe in an Easter she does not expect. And when she hears a stranger say her name, "Mary," she turns around quickly, seeking to see what she already knows. Only Christ could say her name that way. She turns and cries out in wonder and rapture: "Rabboni", Teacher.

There is no more joyful moment in the New Testament than Mary Magdalene's "Rabboni" on Easter morning.

So, my friends, it is Easter again for us. Here we are, an intimate community of friends, a band of brothers and sisters, a family of believers and disciples. Our love of one

EASTER VIGIL

REV. DR. ANTHONY T. PADOVANO

another is a sign that Christ is here. We are prepared to believe in Easter not by miracles and orthodoxy but by a Christ who calls us by name, a Christ who cares about our life and our journey, a Christ who will wash our feet and walk by our side, in all the Emmaus moments of our lives. Easter does not happen at the tomb or in Galilee or Jerusalem. Easter happens in our hearts. This is the only place where we can find the Risen Christ now. Easter is the intimate, tender nearness of God. Everything public about our faith depends on the intimacy of what goes on in our hearts with God and with Christ. Easter is that glorious moment when we cry out from the depths of our souls, "O Rabboni. You are here. I believe."