

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Easter Sunday Year C

There is a wonderful line in the poem of TS Eliot (born in St Louis) *The Four Quartets* the section *Dry Salvages*, where he writes, “***We had the experience but missed the meaning***”- He is studying how it happens that we come upon epiphanies that forever change our lives. Time past recreated and seen anew based on what we are about to experience. He is saying that we sometimes go through things and then only later can look back and see ‘Oh, how much more was going on than I realized. Now, I get it. And will keep getting it- because that discovery is going to keep on repeating itself in me. Having read the gospel just now, we’d be in good company if we said, what I say a lot, “Hold on, I’m in the dark-tell me that again!”

Because, one of the more loaded statements in sacred scripture is that last line of Easter morning’s gospel. John 20:9 “For they did not **yet** understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead” They, the apostles are still figuring it out? Then, it is okay for us to take a while to sort out what Jesus’ resurrection (in fact, we have a whole season of Easter Sundays to meditate on the change God wants in our lives through His Son’s death and resurrection for us!” So what does Easter resurrection mean? Well, we are here to figure it out together.

Let’s start with something unique about John’s gospel. John gives little hints about what is going on in different scenes, and whether there is more to come or not, based on the ‘lighting conditions’. For example, in John 3:2 “Nicodemus came to Jesus **at night**” This Nicodemus is referred to again in John 7:50 “one of Sanhedrin members who had come to Jesus earlier at night...” John’s detail suggests that Nicodemus is still in the shadows regarding Jesus, like a closet Christian who is coming to the light of day, but not yet there-he does come to full spotlight stage by Christ’s burial, as he anoints/dresses Jesus body (Jn 19:39). But John also plays with the stage lighting, when in 13:30 he states that Judas’ betraying hand reached across the table of Jesus to snag a morsel. John says, “Judas took the morsel, and **it was night!**” Lights down, or darkening of scene like we saw yesterday on Jesus’ day of death, when as the song says “The Sun refused to shine” or Matt 27:45 tells us that from noon until three darkness covered the land as Jesus died. (*Don’t we always talk about the poor weather on Good Friday?*) And we will hear about some darkness even after the resurrection as we hear in a couple weeks about Peter’s relapse back into his previous occupation, his fishing escapade in which without Jesus they catch nothing, and John says when they

caught nothing, it was night! (John 21:3 “that night they caught nothing!’) It takes the sunrise appearance of Jesus on the shore to bring about the miraculous catches again (John 21 Catch --but of course, Jesus always brings it!)

So we shouldn’t be surprised when we hear this morning, that the apostles do not yet understand what ‘to rise from the dead’ means. Mary had reported ‘being in the dark’ herself, when she said to Peter and the Beloved Disciple, in John 20:3 “they have taken the Lord from the tomb, and ***we don’t know where (we don’t know)*** they put him.” And finally, here is the clincher: When did Mary go to the tomb? Our same reading says (John 20:1) , “came to the tomb early in the morning, ***while it was still dark....***”

So, where are we with this? Let’s take stock. It is Easter morning, “We know he has risen-he is alive, it is the ***‘first day*** of the week’, and there is a lot of excitement in the hearts of the disciples. So something new and big is in the works. We don’t see it all yet, but we are starting to and it is only going to get better. (John had all but said this in the very beginning of his gospel, where he praises the ‘light (Jesus) shines in the darkness, and the darkness {of night} has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5)

So what does Easter resurrection mean? It means we have to seek-go out to the tomb (Peter wasn’t watching this unfold on a RING or nursery cam, he had to show up. He had to revisit all the places/times where he had already once experienced Jesus before, only it happens that the second, third and many more times of returning to Jesus experiences, he will come to know Jesus fully as risen and resurrected-In His Presence again! We have to peer-work through any shadows, or clouds that obscure the light, (or call it the fog of forgetfulness that afflicts us all at some time-whether it be busy-ness, distractions, preoccupations, etc) We have to remain close to what we already know of Jesus and keep an open eye to him doing even more (and the more will come-that is resurrection-We say we are resurrection people, and that means we are always looking for more light, hope, increasing good and change of resets or restarts. Resurrection means doing it again, but better this time! But we do have to go back or say close to the source-That is the lesson of Thomas’ absent excursion (who knows where?) or Peter’ fish trip we will hear the next couple weeks. They shouldn’t have stepped away, separate, go off in their own directions pulling away from what Jesus has said and done. We want to understand the resurrection so we keep close to him by recalling all things about Him, telling His stories over (and over if needed)-speaking His words again and again to each other, doing what he did-repeating his

actions (not just rituals and prayers-yes, we do those, but also His works of mercy-compassionate conduct toward others.- All of these things keep His light on and in us. Given time, we come more and more to see Him clearly, fully alive and right here with us. So what does it mean that Christ is raised from the dead, as he said, what does that do for us? It helps us see him, know Him and serve Him, by seeing and loving Him one another. That is when the light overcomes the darkness, that is when we see Jesus resurrected right there in front of us- and it happens often with a flash of insight, an epiphany- It is you, Jesus! So looking back at the John's hints about light overcoming darkness, or the full sun of day arriving to take away the night. The night is passed when we experience, know and understand that yes, Jesus is truly risen and present among us. Certainly, Jesus was resurrected 2,000 years ago when he appeared and walked among his apostles again, and today He is resurrected in every recognition and responsive act of mercy done in His Name, because we see Him in each other (that is the motivation behind our acts). Jesus is alive and risen again among us, and we know the dark is overcome and His new day has come, when we see Him in each other.

I love this story rabbi's tell about how to know that day has come, that night is over (big question for them-because so much of their religious law directs them with specific times to perform specific rituals--exactly when Sabbath starts, exactly when Passover begins, etc) The tell it this way.....

A Rabbi once asked his students, "How do we know when the night has ended and the day has begun?" Immediately the students thought that they had the answer. One said, "When I look out at the fields and I can distinguish between my field and the field of my neighbor's, that's when the night has ended and day has begun." He shook his head 'No' A second student offered her answer: "When I look from the fields and I see a house and I can tell that it's my house and not the house of my neighbor, that's when the night has ended and the day has begun." He shook his head, 'No' A third student offered an answer: "When I can distinguish the animals in the yard – and I can tell a cow from a horse – that's when the night has ended." He shook his head again, saddened, 'No, you don't understand, because you only know how to divide! You divide your house from the house of your neighbor, your field from your neighbor's, one animal from another, one color from all the others. Is that all that we humans can do – divide, separate, split the world into pieces? Isn't the world broken enough? No, dear students, it's not that way at all! Our Torah teaches so much more to us." . So, one of his students, asked, "Rabbi, please tell us then: How do we know that night has ended and day has begun?" And the Rabbi answered gently, "When you look into the face of the person who is beside you and you can see that that person is your brother or your sister, and friend, then, finally, the night has ended and the day has begun." And after Jesus' coming, we Christians would add, 'When we see Christ in each other, and serve Him accordingly in our neighbor, then He is truly risen.' The New Day has dawned, and the Light of Christ has arisen among us!