

Then the disciples went away again unto their own homes.

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This year many are finding themselves like the disciples on that first Easter Sunday. Like the Disciples, many of us are in our own homes, “sheltering in place.” We mourn – and should mourn, that we have been encouraged to stay at home and that so many churches have closed across the nation due to this coronavirus. But instead of remembering this Easter as one unlike we have ever known, let us focus instead on a better understanding of the story of the first Easter Sunday.

Just prior to the first Easter Sunday, on Good Friday, Our Lord Jesus Christ had been tortured, crucified, and had died. They had taken His lifeless body down from the cross and had laid Him in the arms of His mother. There was no denying Our Lord’s death. Following His deposition, some of his disciples, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, had come under the dark cover of Friday night to anoint, wrap in funereal clothes, and bury Him in Joseph’s own new tomb. They did not believe that Jesus would rise from that tomb, so they had spread over His body 100 pounds of myrrh and funeral spices and wound it about in pure linen. The women prepared to come the following morning with even more myrrh and spices. The rest of Our Lord’s disciples hid, they “sheltered in place,” for they feared for their lives, perhaps remembering also all the times that Jesus had said He would die and then rise again. The chief priests and Pharisees had also heard Him say this, so they secured a stone to be rolled over the tomb to seal it shut and to be guarded by night sentries. Fulton Sheen writes, *In the history of the world, only one tomb has ever had a rock rolled before it, and a soldier guard set to watch it to prevent the dead man within from rising.* The absurdity of it all seems very funny in retrospect. They did not think that He was the Son of God but they feared that he might rise from the dead!

The women who planned to come to the tomb early this morning did not even know how they would get into the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They talked among themselves on the way there asking, *who will roll the stone away for us?* But they come to the tomb anyways and there they were met with the glorious sight of two angels sitting on top of the stone in dazzling white raiment. The angels spoke to them, and informed them that *Jesus whom you seek is not here, He is risen, go, tell His disciples that He goes before you into Galilee.* The women must have been completely shocked, overawed, and amazed, first to be greeted by angels and then to hear the message that they imparted to them! Can you imagine

such an experience? Would we not have ran back to our homes as fast as we could, back to the Disciples and have told them everything we had seen and heard in the same way!

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb also and she found it empty and thus began to weep. The Lord Himself appeared to her and she did not recognize Him, and then asked Him *where have they taken the body of my Lord?* And then the Lord revealed Himself to her and she recognized the risen Jesus. The rest of the Gospel account records a few other moments where Our Risen Lord comes to His Disciples, and they do not recognize Him immediately. Our Lord, even after His resurrection, had to remind them and teach them that this was all foretold in the Scriptures and that He had foretold all of this to them. It took a while for it to sink in.

Imagine though, the shock and horror of witnessing your best friend, your role model, wholly innocent yet arrested, tortured, and put to death in a gruesome and cruel way. Imagine watching His mother, the sweetest and most virtuous women you had ever known hold His dead body in her arms. Imagine, after it is all said and done, seeing the blood stains on John's robes, on Mary's robes. Such a thing in our culture would be talked about in whispers and accompanied with tears. Now we see that maybe an empty tomb was too good to be true. No wonder it took a while for His disciples to really understand – they had to understand the Resurrection in the midst of grief and mourning.

Today we must understand the Resurrection in an empty church, we must try to remember and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ thousands of years ago with technology that is not even one hundred years old, all while “sheltering in place.” Our fun, our egg hunts have been canceled, our family gatherings and Easter dinners have been postponed, we are encouraged to stay home and away from Mass on this red-letter Holy Day. But maybe this Easter we have more in common with those Disciples than we ever have – confused, sad, angry, afraid to leave the house, “sheltering in place.” But the Easter message, no matter how long it takes to sink in, no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in, is that Jesus Christ is risen today.

Jesus lives; thy terrors now

Can, O death, no more appall us;

Jesus lives: by this we know

Thou, O grave, cannot enthrall us.

Alleluia

Jesus lives; our hearts know well,
Nought from us His love shall sever,
Life nor death nor powers of hell,
Tear us from His keeping ever.

Alleluia.