

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; I Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

Someone sent me an e-mail joke about dogs being "man's best friend." It goes like this: Here is a sure-fire way to prove that a dog is a human being's best friend. Put your dog and your spouse in the trunk of the car for one hour. Then come back and see which one is happier to see you!" Do not try this at home!

The punchline is that a dog is a human being's best friend. But I would contend this morning that Jesus Christ is "our best friend," in fact, the best friend of the whole human race! He does not emerge from the trunk of a car after one hour. After three days, He emerges from a burial tomb in glory, victorious over sin and death! ALLELUIA! I'll bet that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so packed with meaning, that for most of us, it escapes us.

First of all, why didn't His wounds heal at the moment of Resurrection? Was the power of the Father somehow imperfect, insufficient? Two reasons. To remind us that "by His wounds, we were healed," and to remind us that His wounds still exist in our world. In our country. In our own personal lives. As long as members of the human family still suffer, the wounds of Jesus are still there.

You and I still carry the marks of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because you and I are still living and breathing and walking our own Way of the Cross. Those wounds may be visible. They may be emotional. They may be spiritual. But today's Feast of the Resurrection reminds us that they are not permanent. How? Because of another detail in the tomb of the Resurrection.

Why is the cloth that covered the head of Jesus in the tomb separate from the rest of the bodily linens and wrappings? One theory suggests this. It's all about a napkin. The Jewish tradition of using a napkin at the dinner table let the slave or servant know whether or not the master was done with his meal.

If he wiped his mouth and then threw the napkin in a bunch on the table, he was through. If he folded it neatly before leaving the table, he was coming back. Wouldn't that be something, if the head napkin in the tomb of the Resurrection was folded neatly, as if Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, were to say, "Don't take anything away! I'll be back!"

Of course, many believe, myself included, that the Holy Shroud of Turin, Italy bears the full body image -- including the head -- of what was allegedly the dead body of Jesus Christ as he lay in the tomb for three days.

Another image John uses is darkness. "While it was still dark." Mary Magdalene was "in the dark" because she thought the body of Jesus had been stolen from the tomb. She had not yet come to the insight of the Resurrection.

How many of us here this morning are still "in the dark?" Still wondering WHERE or even IF God is anywhere in our lives. We return to the empty tomb, like Mary Magdalene, asking ourselves if this is really true. And, if it is, what difference does this Resurrection make in our lives? What brings you here?

Is there someone we have not yet forgiven? Have we hesitated to get involved in serving others? Do we take our Sunday Mass obligation for granted? What signs of death do we see that we must either confront or walk away from? Are you suffering the lingering consequences of past bad decisions? Setbacks over career aspirations? A general feeling of going nowhere? The feeling that religion works for other people but not for you? That God is somehow absent in your life or at least silent, and that you have been a disappointment to God?

Easter morning begins in the dark for Mary Magdalene, both literally and figuratively. So it is with us. I would guess that most of us are still "in the dark" when it comes to truly believing that Jesus would want us in a personal relationship with Him. That Jesus, the Word of God, came down to earth and humiliated Himself to be born in a human way with a human nature. That Jesus Christ would love you and me enough to die for our sins. That Jesus Christ would rise from the dead and give you and me the same hope of Resurrection through Baptism. He would do all this for YOU and ME? YES!

Mary Magdalene wept. You and I weep. For our sins, our weakness, our shortcomings. But today is not a day for weeping and guilt. Today is a day for rejoicing with the Risen Christ! With all our wounds and brokenness!

Easter was not born in the sunlight; it was born in the dark. And it still comes to us in the dark. Whatever that dark place may be in your life -- however

fearfully dark that place may be -- Easter comes there, in the person of the living Lord. Because the power of death was broken by the Resurrection of the Lord, all the power of darkness was broken, in all the other dark places of life.

Once Mary "sees the light," she becomes what Pope Saint John Paul II called "The Apostle to the Apostles." She is the first to run to the upper room and call the others to the tomb. She becomes the First Apostle to the Resurrection. Who needs us to bring the joy of the Easter message to them? Who do you know has carried that Easter message to you faithfully and lovingly? How can we imitate their example and inspiration? And, on the flip side...

What "old yeast" -- those sinful, selfish, hurtful tendencies in our lives -- have been growing in contradiction to the teachings of Christ and His Church? What does St. Paul advise you, in particular, to do in this passage?

Please enjoy the book we give you as an Easter present, Matthew Kelly's *Resisting Happiness*. Matthew Kelly once more opens our minds and our hearts and causes readers to reassess where they are at in their faith journey. In the first chapter he says: "The hardest war to win is one you don't even realize you are fighting. And the hardest enemy to defeat is the one you don't even know exists. Every day you are at war with resistance." What builds from that statement is a deep dive look at our relationship with God. Are you happy and joy-filled? What makes you happy and joy-filled? Important questions but with a definite answer that takes one out of their comfort zone.

Come this Easter morning to Jesus Christ, "our best friend." May the love our Lord showed for the world at that first Easter bring His joy to your heart, His peace to your spirit, and His holy light to your life. ALLELUIA! AMEN!