

St Pius & St Anthony Easter Sunday Year B Homily

Mary Magdalene is faithful! Like the Blessed Mother she was among the last to leave the burial site and she is the first to show up again early the next morning! But Easter Morning, surprise! She discovers an opened, empty tomb and runs to tell Peter about it. What did Peter think? What would any of us think? Mary herself has suspicions reflected in her words, ““They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him” (John 20:2), She seems to think someone is up to something-well yes, Jesus is up to something- its called ‘up’, rising from the dead. But I wonder if Peter first thought, ‘Mary, we’ve all taken this so hard, are you sure you were at the right tomb?’ Several people in those first days, thought such denials nay-saying and doubting the resurrection, holding that the Christians were misled, or even just lost the body of Jesus. I suggest there are details in today’s gospel that refute or dispel such denials or attacks on the resurrection. But, we can take a minute to ask ourselves if we have ever done such: we showed up alright but showed up at the wrong place. Or showed up and nobody is home: dark empty home, or empty parking lot? We might have thought ‘Am I that early? Or supposed to be somewhere else?’ or what about this one, “You are in a filled up parking lot and you tried to open somebody else’s car door, or place your key in their lock?”

Several months ago, I was in Owensboro and had stopped off at Harbor Freight (I have to confess that I don’t go there in Lent: because as a little penance of mine, I try to buy nothing but necessities in Lent, to simplify and live with less-I do same with book catalogs I drop them straight in the paper recycle bin and donate any money I’d have spent on books toward some charity), so that day, I pulled up in Harbor Freight and was still on a phone call so I backed into a parking spot to wrap up the conversation. I noticed a guy come out of the store with a nice ladder and he went around back of a new big GMC Sierra and lowered tail gate and put in the ladder, then he walked round to the side of truck a minute and then stopped and went back opened tail gate again and took ladder out- I thought, is he already taking it back, maybe his wife called and said ‘No you didn’t buy more stuff you won’t use from the tool store did you?’ or was it ‘buyer’s remorse’. But then he moved over two trucks and put the ladder again in the back of what was really his truck-also a huge white Sierra. He almost gave somebody else a nice ladder? Is that a contractor’s way of paying it forward?

But back to Mary’s discovery of the empty tomb. Yes, she was at the right place. In such traumas like seeing your friend get executed, people remember the smallest details (seared into memory). For Mary, maybe it was the odd shape of the huge rock rolled in front of the tomb, maybe some trails of Jesus’ blood by the tomb entrance (good question, yes they prepared the body for burial- yet where did they do that-in the

commotion at the foot of cross, or just outside the burial site-there may have been debris left behind). But the gospel writer John wanted to ensure that such claims were disproven so he included the details such as Mary Magdalene and others following the body from the cross to its burial site under the additional custody of Joseph Arimathea & Nicodemus (socially influential witnesses). But also this tomb had a unique location within a garden type courtyard of sorts, and add to it, that it was a new-never before used tomb. Maybe the clincher is that it was Joseph Arimathea's own tomb-he would surely know the place of his own tomb-It is his own real estate So, absolutely, Mary is at the right tomb location, but Jesus is gone beyond, or in fact back out there in the community risen and alive among them again.

Yet, John the gospel writer includes another detail that helps put to sleep those claims that Jesus didn't rise from the dead- (Again some detractors whispered that the apostle's secret plot was to abscond with Jesus' body and fake the resurrection). John says the beloved disciple noticed in the tomb the burial cloths in separate places, the sizable burial cloth in one area, and the particular head cloth neatly folded up away from the rest of the burial shroud. Why? Well, such careful placement took time, who would steal a body and risk the time to even open up the goods- usually thieves grab and run- don't all the bad crooks get caught counting the money too early? But then to go to the length of separating the cloths and folding up neatly the head covering-that is just too much- that is a Martha Stewart overemphasis on 'just-right' detail, right? So John records that so that believers can know Jesus is in control, he overcame all opposition-even death; he awakens from death and takes time to fluff the pillows and fold sheets and make the bed. He is in full control. Absolutely, Jesus did rise from the dead; He is alive and present again among his followers. What is death-nothing. Jesus can break through all to bring life- what hope-nothing can keep Christ or us down now. But, there is even one more meaning in this linen detail: a couple of years ago a book circulated talking about the resurrection of Jesus and banquet protocols or proper table etiquette- how to conduct ourselves at formal feasts. This book likened the detail of a folded up head cloth comparing it to a dinner napkin (last time together in joy was at last supper). So think of a dinner napkin and the signal that folding one up carefully, sent to the waiters; for example, imagine that I am at a dinner and need to excuse myself to freshen up or attend to quick business and return. In that case, instead of taking my napkin and wadding it up on the plate, I will carefully fold it and place it at my spot-seat to send the signal that I am not done, I am coming back. So it happens that many people interpret this carefully-folded cloth at Jesus' burial site to be his way of saying, "Disciples, I am not done, I will be back, this Christian feast still has more courses ahead." Which I also think ties in beautifully with post-Easter scripture accounts of how so often when Jesus appears after the resurrection, it is in the presence of food: such as when Jesus

asks in Luke 24:41-‘Have you anything to eat-they give him fish-which also proved he had a real physical body risen that worked as before’- or how about at the seashore when he is fire-baking fish for them (John 21:12 , or most impressive meal was the dramatic conclusion to the encounter with the two disciples, at Emmaus (all of Luke 24), when Jesus is made known in the ‘breaking of the bread’. Yet, Jesus folding up his napkin in the tomb tells us ‘It is not over’. Jesus is in control and He always comes back. With Jesus, there is always the possibility of starting over, beginning again, and trying once more. Jesus rose again to show us that sin cannot keep us down. Jesus leads us to overcome all discouragement or disillusionment. He is the resurrection and life, victorious over sin and death- and we are invited to join in, remaining and rising to new life with Him.