

*Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

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In celebrating Easter, we celebrate the greatest mystery of the Christian faith. A mystery in the world's eyes is something hidden or secret. There are mystery novels and TV shows, in which a favorite detective solves a murder or a crime mystery. Mysteries of this sort require an answer, and yet there are unsolved mysteries that have passed into popular culture, mysteries that defy explanation, with no possible logical answers. We could say that the Bermuda Triangle, the building of the Pyramids, and disappearance of the Mayans are all mysteries. There are also mysteries of the Church, but the Church's mysteries are not called mysteries because there is anything hidden or secret, but because of their fullness and completeness, which make it difficult for the human mind to fully grasp. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest mystery of the Church, because it is through this mystery, that all other mysteries, like the Mass, the Seven Sacraments, and the Nativity gain their validity.

We see how great the mystery of the Resurrection is through the actions of the disciples during this first Easter Week. The Disciples seem to be completely surprised by the empty tomb since they did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead even though He had promised that He would. The Resurrection is not just an empty tomb, or Jesus rising from the dead. Jesus had raised Lazarus from death and Lazarus's tomb was empty for a time too. The Resurrection of Jesus means much more than that, for it is a victory over death, the grave, and the devil. It means that human nature has returned to that state which God intended for us in the Garden of Eden, that human and glorified body will live forever, and is united to God in a way that defies our understanding. The Disciples are not just witness to an empty tomb, they are witness to a profound mystery which brings salvation to the whole world, and their own eventual resurrection from the dead and reconciliation with God.

Despite the many times Jesus had foretold of His Death and Resurrection, the Disciples are still bewildered and confused by the empty tomb. They do not know what has happened to Jesus, and so they spend the week after Easter getting on with their lives. They go back to Galilee, they take up their old fishing nets again, and when they are not on the sea, they hide. In today's Gospel they are all together again, except for two, Judas who is dead, and Thomas who will not believe in the Resurrection until he sees Jesus and His wounds for himself. The Lord had already appeared to Mary Magdalene who had come early to the tomb that Easter morning. The argument could be made that she who had stood so faithfully by the cross and had gone to the tomb several times since Jesus was buried, deserved to see the risen lord. The three myrrh bearing women who also came to the tomb to finish Jesus' embalming deserved to see the angel and to hear the angel say that Jesus has risen. Yet even to rest of the disciples, who had run and hid after Jesus' arrest, who were confused by the empty tomb, who could not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, to these disciples who had abandoned and disappointed the Lord so badly, Jesus appears.

We hear in this morning's Gospel that a week after Easter Sunday the disciples are still hiding. Despite the doors being closed and locked, Jesus comes and stands among them. The disciples were afraid at His presence, there in the middle of them all is the Lord Whom they had abandoned, Whom they had disappointed sorely, Whom they did not expect to see again. Jesus

sees them and knows their fear and instead of admonishing them He says *Peace be with you*, not once but twice. The risen Lord, worthy to stand in judgment of the whole world, the conqueror victorious even over death, is merciful and compassionate to those who had sinned against Him. But the visit is not over with the words *Peace be with you*. He goes on to show them His hands and His side, the trophies of the crucifixion, the signs of God's mercy for mankind. This is the *victory that overcometh the world*.

The *victory that overcometh the world* did not seem much like a victory to the disciples, the close friends, and the Blessed Mother of Jesus. For them the victory was at first overshadowed by the worst tragedy they had ever experienced, the cruel torture and death of their beloved Jesus. Slowly they begin to realize that they are witnesses to the greatest mystery of the world. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, died for the world and rose again. They witnessed the death of death, the defeat of the grave, and they have witnessed real power, the power of God, more powerful than the chief priests and the Roman governor. They see for themselves the mystery of His nail-scarred hands and feet and begin to ponder the meaning of the sacrifice that Jesus has made. They see for themselves that the risen Lord appears and disappears, regardless of the doors being shut and locked; they see Him eat fish and honey with them; they see that a *ghost hath not flesh and bones* as He has.

It is a mystery that the risen Lord appears to His disciples even though they struggle with their faith. What is even more remarkable is that He intends to use them for the spread of the Gospel. *Peace be with you, even as the Father sends me, so send I you*. He who is perfection, uses imperfect humans to spread the Good News of His kingdom, a kingdom that can be reached only by *the Spirit, the water, and the blood*. Christ's Kingdom can be reached only as His *Spirit* brings the *waters* of Baptism and New Life and the *Blood* of the Holy Sacrament that nourishes and strengthens His followers for continued obedience and abandonment to God. The risen Lord desires to draw all of mankind into the mystery and promise of the Resurrection. The risen Lord invites us to begin our journey to the mystery of the Resurrection again this morning, to take part in the *Victory that overcometh the world*. Amen.