



St Mary's Concord

A Refection for Easter Sunday

This reflection is on the Gospel reading for the Easter Vigil in Year A: Mt 28:1-10. The reading from Matthew can also replace the Gospel for Easter Sunday (John 20:1-9).

To contain the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic all churches were closed from 23 March 2020. If you have not already done so, please take a few minutes to read Mt 28:1-10

We live in a society that has tried to tame death. We talk about someone passing over and even in our prayers for those who have died we use expressions such as “those who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection” and “at their passing from this life.”

The funeral industry wants to reassure us that there is continuity by preparing the bodies of those who have died to appear as if they are sleeping. But we also know that there is the finality of the grave as the coffin is lowered into the earth.

Death is even more confronting when we see images like those coming from New York where a site next to a derelict building in Brooklyn has become a mass grave with burials happening on an industrial scale.

How do we hold on to our belief in a personal life beyond death, a life in continuity with the life we live now, when we are confronted by such depersonalized images of death?

Beyond all the euphemisms, we still find death hard. It is the ultimate test of our faith. And even if we do believe in God and in life after death, we still find it difficult to imagine what resurrection means for us.

Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus offers us an insight that makes us think again about some popular images, like the memorial card that said: “Death is nothing really, I've just slipped into the other room.” The intention is to comfort the bereaved family and friends, but in truth death isn't like slipping into the other room.

Matthew doesn't attempt to describe the resurrection of Jesus. His account is about what it means for us. He begins with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary making their way to the tomb. We heard in Matthew's account of the Passion that these same women were present when Jesus died. They were looking on from a distance but they knew what death looked like.

As they walk the path towards the burial ground, they are walking through a world where their hope had been shattered where seemingly power and violence had won. In some ways our world is not so different: bush fires and floods and now a world-wide pandemic have challenged our sense of being in control of our own destiny. Hope is in danger of being overcome by fear.

But suddenly something happened; the world was transformed and the women crossed over to another place. Matthew uses the images of a violent earthquake and of the angel in the empty tomb, to describe God's presence in this place.

The angel says to the women “Do not be afraid”. And then they meet the risen Jesus who also says to them, “Do not be afraid”.



This is not intended to be some warm, fuzzy experience. This is about life and death and the message is about transformation. Not the transformation of the created world, at least not yet. There is still pain and suffering, violence and war, but there is also hope.

Why are the women told: "Do not be afraid". Why should they not fear? Death is always a place of fear for us because at that moment all that we know is taken from us.

The women are told: "go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee." Only in Matthew's Gospel are the disciples told to go to Galilee.

It was on a mountain in Galilee that Jesus first taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven, the term Matthew's Jesus uses for the presence of God in the world.

Soon in Galilee Jesus will send the disciples on their mission and will promise that he will be with them always. Not to take away the harsh realities of life and death but to take away anxiety and the fear, especially the ultimate fear of letting go of life itself.

We are still on that journey and there is still pain and suffering in the world so we too need to hear those words: Do not be afraid. Do not fear even death itself because God's promise has been fulfilled.

The resurrection of Jesus has brought about that transformation. That is Matthew's insight. Through the waters of baptism we become one with Christ and share in his victory over death. That is what we celebrate at Easter, that is what we celebrate every time we gather to share in the Eucharist.

*Paul Crowley
12 April 2020
Easter Sunday*