

Readings

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

Col 3:1-4, or 1 Cor 5:6b-8

Jn 20:1-9

William C. Gabriel, O.S.A.
Malvern Preparatory School
Malvern, Pennsylvania

“Run, Peter! Hurry up, Peter! Let’s go, Peter!”

...these are the words I imagine the beloved disciple, John, yelling to his friend, Peter, as they run to the tomb. And, as we hear, clearly John was the faster runner, so I imagine him taunting Peter with a little banter, saying: “Let’s go, Peter...let’s get there!” – ultimately, inviting him to keep at it.

At the same time, I wonder if Peter is looking at John saying: “Hey, it’s too early, practically still dark out. I haven’t stretched yet, give me a second!” And yet John saying again and again “Come on, Peter!” as they run towards this tomb that they hear is now empty.

Perhaps, as they run, a lot is taking place in their minds and hearts. Think about it, they have just witnessed this entire “holy week.” From the triumphant arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna!”, to the Last Supper and betrayal, to Good Friday which brought humiliation, condemnation, and, ultimately, execution. Understandably, there must be despair, hurt, hardship, grief, and confusion all at once. And it’s in mixed emotion that they run toward this tomb, not knowing what has happened. And they run anyway. Pulled and propelled by hope: hoping that something good has happened, hoping that Jesus may, just might, have risen, hoping as they run.

And when they arrive at the tomb, we hear that John and Peter both enter. They encounter an empty space where the clothes appear neatly folded. In such an encounter of emptiness, one may suspect that at first it brought them face to face with the emptiness of these recent events. Perhaps not too different from the void created by experiences we've faced as we've run the race of life: loss of a loved one who for the first time won't be here this Easter, dealing with a difficult diagnosis, estrangement from family and friends, deep fatigue, and mental illness. And just like the emptiness that Peter and John encountered as they entered the tomb, we find ourselves praying in front of our own: please tell me he has risen, tell me there is hope.

Then we hear that John goes in. Perhaps out of breath (...he was the faster runner) and leaning into the tomb, John "saw and believed." Believed what? He saw the empty tomb and believed that this is what Jesus had been talking about. Right here and now. That death would not have the last word, that life conquers death, peace conquers violence, love conquers hate. This is the victory. So, John sees the emptiness and no longer sees despair and loss, but rather the birth of hope. The birth of new life.

For us, that is what the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in Lent have been trying to get us to: a transformation ready to claim the victory. In the midst of the darkness, the graves, the depression, anxiety, despair, estrangement, stress, fatigue, and loss – we, too, look and confront the empty this morning. We, too, run to the empty tomb this morning with Peter and John and perhaps find ourselves a little out of breath. And we lean in, praying like John that when we see the void, Christ might remind us that there is more here, grace here, undying love here.

There's a reason that this is one of the only gospels where Jesus is not physically present. Did you notice that? Because the challenge of the Risen Christ's presence lives in you and in me.

So, this Easter Day and Season ahead, let us run towards this altar to receive the in-breaking of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist into our empty tombs. Let us allow Christ to enter into our hearts and minds so that we may sing "Alleluia!" with the conviction of faith.

Such is the mission: get a good stretch this morning and run to this altar. Then leave this sacred place and, like Peter and John, run into our world that so desperately needs the hope and joy of the Risen Christ present in, among, and through us this day.

C'mon, Peter, let's go! Hurry up, Peter, let's go! We have good news, Peter, let's go!