

ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

The tragic drama of the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ begins to make meaning from the first day of the week after the crucifixion. The entire episode of shame and agony and human atrocity has left the disciples of Jesus in a terrible state of mind. They had thought it was the end of their journey with the Lord and their hope in the Man of Galilee for the salvation of Israel. He had been taken away from them and crucified to death. It is not out of place for them to worry and fear for their security and life as well. It is likely then that this period could have been the longest of days for these men of Galilee who had followed Jesus with hope since the baptism of John.

The Jews had secured the tomb strongly with guards. However, something had gone “wrong” when Mary of Magdala, one of the disciples of Jesus made a visit to the tomb in the early hours of the first day of the week. The stone had been removed from the tomb. Mary of Magdala made this visit “while it was still dark.” It was the courage of love and concern. She had not intended to meet with the living. She had gone to honor the dead because love is stronger than death. Her journey takes on a new turn as she becomes the first disciple of Jesus to notice that the tomb stone had been rolled away. Who could have done this and why? In her utter confusion, she runs to call the disciples Simon Peter and the other “whom Jesus loved.” It is believed to be John. The unfolding drama takes a sequence of gradual revelation of the meaning, “he had to rise from the dead.” The stone had been removed from the tomb; the burial clothes were there; and they were rolled up separately and carefully. The tomb was empty. The disciple, “the one who had arrived at the tomb first”, saw and believed! It was the dawn of truth and meaning.

For while Jesus had been with the disciples the thought and teaching of rising from the dead was unimaginable for some reasons: he is not expected to die because he is the Messiah, the Savior of the people who will sit on the throne of David as King; secondly, the image of a suffering Messiah was not part of their understanding of the Son of God. Though the imagery of the Suffering Servant as recorded in the Scriptures had been there, it still did not resonate with the disciples. How we can sometimes choose to listen to what we wish to listen to and tend to ignore other matters of great significance. This is what had happened with the disciples of Jesus. Being overwhelmed with the fear of suffering and death which Jesus had foretold of himself, little attention was given to the reality of the resurrection which was part of the experience. In their mind, it could have sounded like one event that may never happen. However, the evidence of the empty tomb, on this first day of the week, does not suggest any more than a fulfillment of that reality foretold by their Master and Lord. Thus, the young disciple whom Jesus loved “saw and believed.”

Now with the idea of Jesus rising from the dead making meaning to the disciple, the entire tragic drama of Jesus’ passion and death take up a new vision and spring of hope. It is the dawn of hope. Incidentally, but more significantly, this takes place on the first day of the week. The symbolism shares a new appreciation of time and history. The new covenant charts a new

beginning away from the old. It however shows some element of relationship with the old covenant by the elements of sacrifice and Passover and redemption. It marks the new journey of hope towards the Promised Land. Strikingly, the old covenant is done with. The historic Passover was meant to really be a new Passover from the gloomy days of the helpless and sinful Adam to a new and redeemed Adam. It was a Passover of the Lord of life from death to life; and from this world in return to his Father. The new week and a new day draw us to a completely new beginning. The new day is made sacred by this new beginning for the disciples of Jesus. The tomb stone that held us hostage to our corruption is rolled away. The power of God, the divine power over the impossibilities of life had rolled out the tomb stone; while the women disciples were asking, "Who will roll out the tomb for us?" Like them we can be worried about the difficulties and challenges of life. Our wondering is given hope. Before we could even ask, the power of God has taken care of our challenges. We only need to peep in and see that there is nothing there. If the tomb is empty, our corruption is taken away. The disciples can convincingly bear witness to the resurrection. And without fear of possible repercussions, they begin to proclaim the truth of the life and mission of Christ as the Savior of the world. His death was not after all, his end, but the birth of a new beginning for all humanity. We now live in that new dispensation that gives hope to our despair and brings light to our darkened world. The wages of sin which is death has lost its power in the resurrection of the Son of God.

This privilege of life is an offer of a new beginning for all the Christian faithful. The more we appreciate the meaning of the passion and death of Jesus on the cross, it is the more we become true witnesses of his name. He does not wish that his suffering and death be in vain because we fail to realize the price paid for our redemption. It has cost him so much to redeem fallen humanity. Thus, he appreciates each of us given to him by his Father and would not wish to lose any soul to that enemy of humankind. However, it is just that contemporary practice of faith tend to make simplistic his demands on us as if he asks for too much. Jesus simply asks for one thing: our love. An unloving heart is like a lost soul; and a lost soul is a painful memory of his passion. A righteous soul is filled with the joy of his love. It is a simple appreciation of his love shown to humanity by his death on the cross. The ridicule of the person of Jesus is done daily by our coldness to the gratuitous gift of himself; a sheer testimony of some undeserving ingratitude from many of us. Yet, he never fails to offer us an opportunity of a new life and a new beginning where the past is cleaned up in that empty tomb.

The opportunity of a new beginning and of renewal as springs of hope is what the Easter joy is all about. It is a celebration of victory over sin and death; over falsehood and conspiracy; over human atrocity and meanness; it is the healing of our brokenness. Jesus is the Savior of humankind. Since we are unable to save ourselves and our sacrifices are unworthy to redeem what was destroyed, Jesus' blood wipes away the claims put on us. As much as we can appreciate any one who clears our debt for us, how much more we can show appreciation and rejoice over the spiritual debt of our soul that Jesus has taken away. In the same way, if we resent those who cannot express gratitude for some kindness shown to them, the same way it hurts

Jesus for our cold hearts in relation to the price he has paid to ransom us. This offer is so priceless that we have to take advantage of it to honor him who died to save us from eternal damnation. Jesus is risen from the dead! Our debt is paid!! Alleluia!!!