

Easter Sunday Homily Cycle A
April 4, 1999

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-9

Our Easter finery is a profession of faith in the resurrection of Christ.

A second grade teacher was taking her pupils on a walking tour along a riverbank. One shrewd youngster in the class saw through the purpose of the outing. He took one of his classmates by the arm and, in a confidential but authoritative voice offered this bit of advice: “Don’t look. If we look we’ll have to tell about it tomorrow.”

In the gospel we read at the Masses on Easter Sunday morning, John chapter 20, Mary Magdala in her eagerness comes early Sunday morning to the tomb and finds the stone rolled away from the entrance. She goes back in haste to tell Simon Peter, and the beloved disciple. The two come running to find the tomb empty and the linen cloths and the headband rolled up. This, it turns out, is a significant detail. It was probably included to support the conclusion that there had really been a resurrection: if someone had removed the body, the burial cloth would have been taken away as well. That’s a fascinating detail in St. John’s account of Jesus’ resurrection regarding the burial cloths of Jesus.

The gospel makes a point of where Peter and the other disciple find the wrappings. The shroud and

cloths in which Jesus’ body was wrapped and bound are found on the ground; the cloth that covered Jesus’ face was rolled up separately. It seems very deliberate, planned. Whatever Mary and Peter and the disciples saw Jesus wearing in his appearances on Easter morning and evening gave no indication of his excruciating passion; his Easter garb was not the shroud of the dead. Jesus left the bindings of death behind. Forever.

On this Easter, many of us are wearing special Easter clothes, as well – shoes, dresses, suits, ties, sweaters, slacks. After a long winter, we’re finally able to leave the old dark colors of winter behind and put on the colors of the long awaited spring.

The custom of wearing special or new outfits at Easter originated with the early church. When the newly baptized emerged from the pool of water at the Easter Vigil, they were dressed in new white robes as a sign of their “putting on Christ.” They left behind their old lives in the baptismal waters, emerging from the pool reborn into the life of the Risen Christ. Even the Christians who had been baptized in previous years dressed in special clothes at Easter to indicate that they, too, were reborn through the penance and prayer of Lent.

So the special outfit we wear today is part of the custom dating back to that first Easter morning: our

Easter finery is nothing less than a profession of the faith in the resurrection of Christ.

Our special clothes, notwithstanding, we do live our lives as if wrapped and bound in burial cloth – shrouds that we spin for ourselves out of our fears, our doubts, our prejudices, our narrow-mindedness. We cling to the safe wrappings and things of the dead, afraid or intimidated to live the life of God; we can't seem to put aside the things of the dead to take up, instead, the things of God. Each, however, calls us to newness: a newness of attitude, of perspective, of spirit. The grace and hope of the Risen Jesus enables us to put aside the shrouds of fear and distrust that cover us, to walk out of the tombs of vengeance and anger that imprison us.

In Russia, there is a customary greeting at Eastertime...instead of saying, "Happy Easter," the Russian people proclaim: "Christ is risen!" And the response is, "Christ is risen indeed!"

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