

Homily for April 15, 2001
Easter Vigil/Easter

By Father Charles Bowes

Luke 24:1-12

It is faith that brings us here - faith in a crucified and risen Lord.

Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem used to preach his Easter season sermons to the recently baptized while seated in front of the Lord's tomb in the Anastasis Rotunda of the Holy Sepulcher complex. The neophytes gathered around him would be invited to gaze at the open door of the tomb. "You see this tomb?" The bishop would ask. "It was you who came forth from the tomb when you were baptized and came to life." Their eyes beheld the geographical locus of salvation, grounding it in an historical event in real time in human space, rather than the spoken memory of others.

As strong as our convictions are about the resurrection, none of us can prove it took place. There was no body. There are no secular sources that report the event as such. There is no shred of evidence in the scientific sense that assures us that what our clear and unequivocal tradition testifies is true. There are no secondary accounts of the events recorded. Only true

believers in the values and experiences portrayed can testify to the veracity of the story. For people who believe and relate, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not, no explanation is possible.

No, we gather at the baptismal pools and celebrate the New Passover not because we can prove an empty tomb. We gather not because we anticipate new evidence that will definitively demonstrate two millennia of Christian belief. We come because we believe that empty tomb or not, we know something happened. People who had hidden in fear no longer were afraid. People who knew Jesus intimately now proclaimed him alive. Two disciples walking along the road had an experience with someone who didn't look like Jesus but had all the marks, and now they had a story to tell. For all those who had been so fearful and controlled by the prospect of death or persecution, none of that held as much power as Jesus' memory and Jesus' values.

For us, Jesus is alive to the degree the gospel values he left us transcend our fears, failures, materialistic aspirations. We are here because for us something has happened and we see. Fear of ridicule and scorn cannot keep us from proclaiming and living Jesus' values. Our faults and differences cannot keep us from working together for the truth. Religious

differences cannot keep us from working together for the common good. For us who believe, Jesus lives and keeps appearing in unlikely people and places.

For us who believe no explanation is necessary; for those around us, none is possible. Others will be convinced only by the witness of our lives.

This is the faith into which we invite those who would be baptized. Our baptismal commitment is to proclaim that we have indeed had some reason to believe that we have seen the Lord. The blind see, the lame walk, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. We have seen it with our own eyes, and we are willing to be submerged with these new witnesses to prove it.

How blessed we are to have people baptized and received into Full Communion at the Vigil. Because of their faith, we all can renew our faith. We will go in procession now from here to the church, and we shall gather around the pool. I would ask that those to be baptized come first in procession together with their families. We will not all be able to see the baptisms with our eyes, but we are all here to be in solidarity with them, to protect them, to make them feel safe. We are to support them with our faith. After the baptism, those to be received into Full Communion or complete their sacraments of initiation will do so, and then they will be the first to lead us to the water made holy by those baptized. We shall all renew our baptismal promises. After the baptisms and the Profession of Faith, we shall celebrate the public recognition of the baptismal commitment of those being received into the

Church - we shall be able to see that with our eyes. I would now like Mrs. Klich, our Pastoral Associate, to call those to the sacraments of Easter.

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