

**Homily for March 31, 2002
Easter Sunday**

By Father Charles Bowes

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

The story of the early Church believing in the resurrected Lord is our story even now.

Years ago, an old municipal lamplighter, engaged in putting out his lights one by one, was met by a reporter who asked him if he ever grew tired of his work in the cold, dark nights of labor. “Never am I cheerless,” said the old man, “for there’s always a light ahead of me to lead me on.” “But what do you have to cheer you when you’ve put out the last light?” asked the news writer. “Then comes the dawn,” said the lamplighter.

A man of the world might have asked Jesus the same question. One light after another did he put out: the lamp of popular acclaim, the lamp of patriotic approval, the lamp of ecclesiastical conformity – all for the sake of God’s love which burned in his heart and showed him a better way. At last, even the light of his life was to flicker out on a hill called Calvary. What then? We hear his voice, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit,” and then came the dawn.

Very early in the morning, as soon as the sun came out and they dared to go outside, they hastened to the tomb – those first believers.

The first ones who came were the women, those who had loved him so very much. They were loaded with linen, oil and perfumes, because they came to bury him properly.

The men only came afterwards, when the news about the empty grave reached them. They were running very fast, as fast as they could. John, being the younger, overtook Peter, but being the younger, he waited for Peter to enter the tomb. They all gazed into the tomb before entering it, full of hesitation. They were all surprised, very surprised.

The story is, of course, about what happened to Jesus, and yet when you read it, it’s all about them – it’s all about those first believers.

First it happened to Mary; then it happened to the other women; then it happened to John and Peter; then to the others and finally to Thomas. They believed; something happened in them.

Certainly, something happened to Jesus. That’s what we are celebrating today. No doubt, he rose from the dead. Yes, he overcame darkness and evil. But the story is really about what happened to them when they saw the empty tomb, when he appeared to them, a first time, a second time, in the house where they met, outside at the lake, seeing him walking over the sea, eating bread and the fish he fried for them.

The story is about them; they believed.

These gospel narratives are designed not just to talk about Jesus – obviously there were no direct witnesses of the resurrection itself – rather the gospel stories are designed to give us the experience of encountering the risen Lord.

I think a question we might ask to enable the power of that resurrection experience to take hold of us might go something like this: “What was it like, Mary, that first Easter day? What was it like, Peter, John, that first Easter day?” Just in asking the question we’re open to something other than we can understand – we lay ourselves vulnerable to the power of God in Jesus’ resurrection. We don’t know altogether what it means – it means so many things – certainly death is definitively conquered even though physical death continues. Eternal life conquers death without abolishing it, and we are not asked not to weep, but only not to despair, for the one in whom we believe is our resurrection, because he is our life.

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