

Homily for March 27, 2005
Easter, A Cycle

By Father Charles Bowes

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

Now we will not die forever.

It seems as if Christmas was only yesterday. Maybe it seems that way because Christmas is much easier to celebrate than Easter.

The story is clearer, more serene and well defined. The savior is in one place: a manger. We can grasp his presence and point to him and say, "There he is." Look at him, touch him, hug him, kiss him. And angels are where they belong: up in the sky, singing.

Easter is far more nebulous and elusive. There is very little about the resurrection accounts that is serene and idyllic. People are scurrying about, frightened, fretful and confused. People are looking, not in a manger for a rosy-cheeked child, but in a tomb for a dead man. And the angels aren't up in the sky; they're guarding the entrance of the tomb.

Look at the symbols of Christmas: a star, a silent night, shepherds tending their flocks. The warmth of swaddling clothes. A tender, vigilant love of a mother.

Look at the symbols of Easter: dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary, Salome, John, Peter – all scurrying about. A gardener, young men or angels at the tomb, a slab of stone, neatly wrapped burial clothes. For the most part, there's total confusion. The only serene and confident people are the angel or the young men at the tomb: "Do not be afraid...he is risen, he is not here."

We struggle mightily to say something about the triumph of love: dawn over darkness, love over sin, victory over death. We use the symbols of fire, water, oil. All gestures of love, healing and re-birth.

St. Augustine said: "Give me a lover, and you will understand the resurrection." The resurrection is the story of God's love. The resurrection celebrates God's faithfulness to the promise of his eternal love. They could crucify the body of Jesus, but they couldn't kill his love. It was out of love that he died for us, and it was Love who raised him up. "Oh, death, where is thy victory, where is thy sting?"

We do not celebrate the resurrection, as some rationalists say, as the rising of Jesus in the hearts of the disciples. That says too much about them and about us, and too little about God. When we shout, "He is risen," God says, "Now you will not die forever." This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Now we will not die forever.