

Homily for April 16, 2006  
Easter

By Father Charles Bowes

John 20:1-9 or  
Mark 16:1-7

*Stones preventing us from experiencing Easter joy come in many shapes and forms. Only Easter faith can move away the stone.*

A fifth grade class planned to perform an Easter pageant for the parish. Each boy and girl had an assigned part. Girls took the roles of Salome, Mary Magdalene and the other women at the cross. Boys got to play Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, the sons of Zebedee, Peter and the Roman guards. Johnny, an energized kid, wanted the part of the stone that rolls in front of the tomb. The stone required no costume. Johnny would roll himself up into a ball and become the stone before the tomb. At the final performance, the teacher, feeling sorry for Johnny, asked if maybe he wanted to play the role of Nicodemus and get to wear a costume. The boy playing Nicodemus could be the stone that night. But Johnny would have none of it. "Besides Jesus, the stone is the most important part," Johnny said. "If the stone doesn't roll away, then nobody can get into the tomb and see that it's empty!"

What wisdom came out of the mouth of this young boy. He understood that the stone wasn't rolled away for the person inside the tomb (Jesus), but for the benefit of those outside the tomb (us). The stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out, but to let us all in. Easter rolls the stone away so that we might penetrate the very mystery of life and death.

The tomb could not hold Christ, and it cannot hold us either. And no stone is so large that God cannot roll it back. God can roll away the stones that keep us from experiencing the Easter mystery.

Stones come in all shapes and sizes. Our personal stones can be made up of weakness and fear, injustice and violence, anger and guilt. Our stones take many forms. Easter tells us that God wants the stones that keep us entombed to roll away with the same vigor as Johnny played it up in the fifth grade production!

Initially, fear kept the apostles away from the joy of Easter. Fear keeps us tucked away, too – tucked away from life. The disciples knew only terror upon the death of Jesus. Many of them went into hiding, not only because they feared the Roman and Jewish authorities, but because they also wondered whether God had turned against Jesus...whether God had abandoned Jesus to the cross. Isn't this much the same for us when tragedy and hardship enter our lives? Yet the empty tomb and the rolled-up burial cloths bid us not to be afraid, but to believe...like the disciple whom Jesus loved, believed.

Stones do roll away. Self-centeredness becomes selflessness. Emotional trauma sufferers find strength

they never knew they had. The guilt-ridden encounter means to forgive themselves. Stones have many names, and some stones are more massive than others: stones of loneliness and pain, hunger and thirst, unbelief and doubt, grief and loss.

Who rolls away the stone for us? The one who is raised up from the tomb rolls away our stones and grants us the faith of the disciple who ran to the tomb with Peter and believed.

One of the symbolic meanings of Easter eggs is their resemblance to a small stone. In order to enjoy what is inside, the outer shell must be cracked and broken. So it will be with the bread we break and the wine we pour at the altar. The one who is broken and poured out for us bids us not to be afraid, and to believe.

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