

April 1, 2018 Easter Vigil

I have to do one for Jean since he just got back. Little Susie was in religious ed class and the teacher was talking about the resurrection, the passion and everything. The teacher says, "I wonder what Jesus said when he came out of the tomb?" Little Susie went, "I know, I know, I know." The teacher says, "Okay, what did He say Susie?" And Susie went, "Tadaaaaaa!"

A fourth grade teacher planned to perform an Easter pageant for the parents of her students. Every boy and girl had a part to play. After all the parts were given out, the last child to receive a part was Johnny. He got to be the stone in front of the tomb. No special costume was required for this part. All he had to do was roll himself up in a ball and pretend to be the stone. The teacher felt sorry for Johnny since all the other children got costumes. Before the final performance of the pageant, she asked Johnny if he wanted another part so he could wear a costume. Johnny did not want to change, he said, "It's the most important part, if the stone doesn't roll away, then nobody can see the tomb and see that it is empty." For a fourth grader, that's pretty profound.

Tombs are typically places of sorrow; people died, people are there. I've been to many tombs of famous people. I've been to Washington's Tomb, and Jefferson's Tomb and Lincoln's Tomb and Grant's Tomb, and Pope John Paul the 2nd's Tomb, and Pope John Paul the 1st's Tomb and Pope Paul the sixth Tomb, a bunch of other tombs. But, all of them were still there. Rome is full of them. There is only one tomb that we have said is empty and that is the Tomb of Jesus Christ. The tomb that brings us tremendous joy. Out of all the things in the bible, archeologists will tell us, (secular archeologists, not religious) will tell us that the Tomb of Jesus is the most credible evidence ever, that we have in the faith of Christianity. They can say, "Well, they had a church built over the site of the enunciation, but we can't prove that." But the church of the Holy Sepulchre, since 66AD we've held Masses there. A Church has been built on that site, only recently. People would not walk on that site. That's the site of Calvary where the three crosses were. That's the site of the Tomb of Jesus. It wasn't very far apart. One whole building covers every site. But just recently, archeologists excavated, went down and took the tomb apart and found everything was authentic. Since 1850's, four churches that have control of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They cannot agree on anything. In the 1850's we had a treaty that said, "Everything in this church will stay the same as it was in 1850. If you go there, you would see a ladder up against the wall; it's been there over 100 years, you're not allowed to move anything. And so you go in there, before the restoration and it's falling apart. The place is decrepit. The Tomb of Jesus was going to fall in upon itself. So after long years of negotiation, the Greek Orthodox patriarch got these guys, monks, priests, to agree, "We need to do something." Then they had to go along and spend years, "What do we need to do?" Then years on, "How are we going to close the church?" The church was closed for 72 hours; day and night they worked on this. But they now have recorded evidence, that everything's factual. There's even an original back wall of the Tomb. Out of all the beliefs that we have, out of all the sites in the world that are holy, the Tomb is the most credible. The Tomb of Jesus.

You and I were created for joy. You never hear someone say, "You know this whole joy, it's not for me, I wish I had a little more misery in my life." Nobody says that. We were created for joy; we come to realize it's not something that we can just buy and own. Think about the most joyful moments of your life. Isn't it true, that they were a surprise? The joy you felt. This is why the Tomb comes into play. The

gospels on Easter, give us an idea of the surprise of discovering the empty Tomb. Mary Magdalene had been there at the foot of the cross. She had seen Jesus die. Crucifixion was not a joke; it was such a horrible way to die that even the Romans eventually outlawed it. Mary Magdalene was not expecting an empty tomb; she knew that Jesus had really died. So when she sees the empty tomb, she doesn't know what to make of it so she runs and she tells Peter and John. Then they both run to the Tomb. "This crazy woman, we don't believe you." Apparently John had been more faithful to his workouts than Peter, and he beat him to the Tomb. He looks in and he waits for Peter, because you should always respect your elders. Even if they can't beat you in a foot race you should wait and let them go in first. Here in the west, we would let our women and our elders go in first, in the 1800's, just in case there were rattle snakes inside. What John and Peter saw surprised them; or what they didn't see surprised them. The body of Jesus is gone. The burial clothing was there, but the body was gone. The Greek says that the burial clothing was lying there in its folds. It's just like Jesus had evaporated from under the cloth; like the magicians try and get us to believe, but there was no body. Imagine their surprise, "What happened here?" And then the gospel says that John saw and believed. He believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. The surprise must have overwhelmed him. He began to believe, because he was filled with joy, tremendous joy. He probably could have floated at that point in time.

Joy is the best response to Easter. Who could have imagined that death could be conquered? That's what Easter means. Your death and my death is not the end. Just as Jesus rose from the dead; we'll rise from the dead. We will rise from the dead; body and soul will live forever. Death is just a doorway and for many centuries, Christians believed that. But today we have paganism intruding on us. And so people are doing all these crazy things about death. They're forgetting; it's a doorway. It's a place we are going to be eventually reunited, on the other side. Suffering does not have the last word; death does not have the last word. The love of God, given to us in Jesus Christ, has the last word. That's why the psalm today shouts out, "This is the day the Lord has made, let's rejoice and be glad." On Easter we also are surprised by the risen Jesus. We too, are filled with joy. When we realize the gift of Easter, joy is the best response.

Today in the Orthodox Church, it's called Joke Saturday. Priests go around telling jokes to each other, to make themselves laugh. It's in honor of the joke that God played on Satan. Satan thought he won; he rejoiced this night. Then in the morning when Christ resurrected, he was the fool. So today is Joke Saturday. Just in case you never remember. Now, once upon a time there was an old lady selling flowers on a street corner, on Easter Sunday. Frail, little, flower lady. She was so thin that the word frail did not seem strong enough to describe her. Her face was wrinkled and bronzed by too much time in the sun. Her hair was pinned up in a bun and covered with a funny little hat, with fake flowers on it. Her clothes were too big and well worn. Can you see her? As Pat approached, this woman who saw her, she looked at the woman's face; it was absolutely radiant and smiling. It was the kind of smile that made her look absolutely beautiful. Taking a flower, Pat paid her and said to her, "How happy you look this morning." Pat was not prepared for the lady's response. "Everything is beautiful." Pat said, "What?" Seeing her obvious condition in life, Pat thought, "How can everything be so beautiful?" Pat said to the flower lady, "You certainly wear your troubles well." Still beaming with a big smile, the flower lady really startled Pat by saying, "When Jesus died on Good Friday, that was the worst of days, then three days later came Easter, so when my troubles come my way, I simply wait three days and trust that everything gets alright again. When it seems like Friday night; Sunday's on the way.

So, we need a way to find joy. It's a gift of the Holy Spirit, it's the fruit of the Holy Spirit. One of those fruits that some of these people here tonight are going to receive in confirmation. It's a gift from God, but God will never force joy on us. We have to prepare the soil of our hearts. Here are three suggestions to help you do that. You call it "GPS."

G: Gratitude. I heard someone say that a grateful heart silences a complaining tongue. If you're always griping, the power of the Holy Spirit will fill your hearts with joy. So if we need more joy in our lives, start by being grateful. A simple way to do this is to write down one thing you're grateful for each day. You'd be amazed.

P: Prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of joy. Joy is the result of our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes Christ present to us.

S: Sharing. If you are not feeling very joyful, try to bring joy into someone else's life; you'll be astounded by what happens in your own heart. Call someone, smile at someone, do something kind, and joy flows from that. So, "GPS" Gratitude, Prayer, Sharing.

And now we are going to celebrate with great joy, those that are receiving their sacraments of initiation and later, all of us will partake in the greatest joy we ever receive, the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is no longer in the Tomb. Holds the only record for ever leaving the Tomb.

God bless you