

Why Easter?

Easter Homily at St. Paul Cathedral 2015

Genesis 1:1-2:2; Genesis 22: 1-18; Exodus 14:15-15:1; Isaiah 54:5-14; Isaiah 55:1-11; Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4; Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28; Romans 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-7

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Peace be with you! Friends, I love how the famous Dutch painter – Rembrandt – depicts the risen Christ. In his famous painting that hangs in Buckingham Palace, Rembrandt depicts the risen Christ. He depicts him in dazzling white – for that is the description we have from tonight’s Gospel from St. Mark.

And Rembrandt also depicts him as gardener – for that is how he appeared to the women in the Gospel of St. John. The painting shows this risen Christ holding a spade as if ready to do some gardening. Rembrandt also shows the risen Christ wearing a typical 17th century farmer’s hat – something quite common at the time Rembrandt lived.

Just to drive home the point, I’ve brought over a little gift I received from our own Fr. Rogelio Gutierrez. As many of you know, he’s the famous gardener here at the Cathedral. I had the honor of touring his beautiful garden of flowers and vegetables last spring. At the end of my tour he gave me one of his gardening hats. He makes them himself. They’re similar to what regular field hands would wear to protect them from the sun in Mexico. If Rembrandt were painting in Mexico he probably would have used this hat!

What’s the point? The point is this: the risen body of Christ is not immediately recognizable. The women at the tomb confuse him for a gardener. The disciples of Jesus who spent so much time following him through Judea and Galilee confuse him for a fisherman on the shore. The disciples of Emmaus confuse him as a wayfarer on the road.

Why this confusion? Our bodies – our “earthly dwellings” as St. Paul would put it – are animated by a soul. None of us has seen a soul but because of death we know by logical deduction when the soul has left the body. Yet St. Paul explains to the early Christians in Corinth that the “risen” body is not animated by a soul – but by God’s very Spirit and in doing so our “corruptible” body by the power of God’s Spirit – takes on “incorruptibility.” This is the “glorified” body the early followers of Jesus encounter after the resurrection. It’s a glorified body that has physicality but it also passes through locked doors. It has an appearance before his ascension into heaven. But as St. Thomas shows us in the Gospel, the physical appearance of Christ only becomes recognizable when he first looks at his wounds.

What’s true for St. Thomas is even more the case for me and for you. If forgiveness is the starting point for Good Friday with Jesus extending his pardon even before he is crucified, then the wounds of Jesus become the starting point for our celebration of Easter. Where there are human wounds there is Christ waiting to be recognized anew. As C.S. Lewis so eloquently noted, next to the sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest

object ever presented to your sight because in him or her, the living Christ is truly present. (“The Weight of Glory,” in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces.*)

With a little more depth and richness, the Fourth Century Jerusalem Catechism attributed to St. Cyril notes as much. “Let no one imagine that baptism consists only in the forgiveness of sins and in the grace of adoption. Our baptism is not like the baptism of John, which conferred only the forgiveness of sins. We know perfectly well that baptism, besides washing away our sins and bringing us the gift of the Holy Spirit, is a symbol of the sufferings of Christ.”

Friends, the sufferings of Christ are the doorway to Easter. Easter invites us into – not simply the canvas of the great artist Rembrandt – but the real-life canvas of the first disciples. With them we gaze upon the wounds. Gazing on the wounds we see Christ in his resurrected glory! As we respond to the Easter creed this night, may our belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ animate our own desire to see him now in the wounds of those around us – both near and far! In recognizing those wounds may we die with Christ in our daily life so that we might rise with him on the final judgment day sharing with him eternal and everlasting life! Peace be with you!