

EASTER DAY

Can you image that celebrating Easter might bring danger for most of us? The danger comes from our knowing in advance the outcome of the drama, that Jesus rose from the dead. Knowing what is going to happen, we are in danger of not being shocked by this unimaginably joyous, unprecedented event.

If we are not careful, Easter can become just another one of those stories with a feel-good, happy ending. If we are not careful, the hair on the back of our necks will not stand up when we hear the almost unbelievable Good News.

This is so, because familiarity can breed, if not contempt, then at least a ho-hum, of-course-he-rose-on-the-third-day kind of attitude. If we give in to this familiar thinking, Jesus' death on the cross is hardly a life-changing gift, but rather is a short pause in a celebration lined only with bunnies and baskets, colored eggs and family dinners.

In the depth of our faith, it is important that we understand Easter profoundly and appreciate its ultimate value; it is important that we remember that it follows, and gives meaning to the weight of Good Friday and the pain that dark day brings.

The sadness and darkness of Good Friday discloses several things that should never be glossed over, lest Easter lose its goose-bump-producing, almost too-good-to-be-true character.

Is worth noting that the women disciples were among the very few who stayed with Jesus until the end, waiting with Him until he died. They knew He was dead, that it was no illusion. For them, as well as for all His followers, Jesus' crucifixion and

death seemed like a crushing, disillusioning end, without hope or redemption. For them, all was lost, all was dark. Despite the promises they wanted to cling to, it appeared that Jesus and His cause had been defeated. After all, He had suffered the humiliating shame and the reality of death by crucifixion.

Maybe His opponents were right; His death showed Him to be just a deluded messianic pretender.

However, despite this apparent reality, the women stayed with Him throughout this tragedy. The women stayed with Him even after His death. Despite their despair, they went to His tomb early Easter morning. Yet, what these broken-hearted, still-faithful women found when they arrived, was that the body of Jesus was not there. So they became the first to experience the frightening, awesome discovery that sometime during the night He had risen from the dead as He had promised He would.

At first, however, they did not know what to make of His absent body. Terror and amazement seized them, and they fled the tomb. These women became the first believers for whom it was not enough just to know that the tomb was empty. In reality, the empty tomb does not prove the meaning of the Resurrection.

The women's experience shows us what else is necessary.

It was facing Jesus' death, and continuing to stay true to Him afterward, that allowed them to discover the Resurrection. They found that He was alive to them in a way they could never have imagined, in a way that could never end. They discovered that what the world put to death, God raised high. This is the meaning of Easter: God's love triumphs over every barrier.

Easter means that no power on earth can destroy the reality that is Jesus Christ, not even death.

The angel gave the women the clue that unlocks, for every Christian, the power of the Resurrection. The angel instructed

them to tell all the other disciples that Christ had risen, and had gone before them into Galilee. The angel told them that they should quit looking for Jesus in death, but rather, find Him alive in a new way, in the life of the world. If they could do that, they would discover the meaning of the Resurrection. They would discover that even despite our lack of commitment to God, God remains committed to us – in a loving, unconditional, no-strings-attached kind of way – despite how much, or little, we might deserve that love. They will discover that God makes them the most precious beings in creation – people who are worth dying for.

Easter is coming face to face with a Jesus who has not just reversed the power death, but has completely triumphed over it. Today is *the* day in our faith to proclaim this fabulous news.

The Good News of the Resurrection is that Christ is a light that overcomes all the darkness that life can entail. That light overcomes the darkness we experienced as we journeyed with Jesus through Holy Week, when we passed through vivid reminders of our human frailty and sin, reminders of how easy it is for us to be gobbled up by the power of the enemies of God. Now – today – we can declare that things are different. Now we know we have the love and light of Christ going before us, and living within us. Now we can see the way, and dare to bring that love and light to the darker parts of our world.

Today, according to our tradition, we begin saying again, as a response to the dismissal, “Thanks be to God, Alleluia. Now we can express, once again, the joy of these empowering words.

Now we go forth from this service back into our workaday world in a renewed and transformed way. We can go forth with confidence and courage because we know that, as Christ went before the disciples into Galilee, He also goes before us into all

the world.

Christ leads the way for us, always going before us, raising us with Him from the depths – from sickness and pain and even death, from disappointment and sin, despair and grief. Christ always goes before us as our light in the darkness, allowing us to reflect His light into the world.

Today we move with the women at the tomb, into a renewed life, ready to face everything with joy, and filled with God's love, proclaiming and showing that Christ is risen, indeed.

Today we shout "Thanks be to God. Alleluia!! Alleluia!!"

AMEN