

EASTER COLUMN (April, 2024)

In the gospel for Easter Sunday, we have Saint John's account of the two apostles, Peter and John, discovering the tomb empty. The evangelist records how John, the younger of the two, outran Peter and arrived first at the sepulcher. But the younger apostle deferred to Peter and allowed him to enter first. John followed and the evangelist remarks of him that he saw and believed. (cf. Jn 20:8)

Seeing leads to believing. But why is it said of only one apostle that he believed? John is the beloved apostle. (cf. Jn 21:20) He sees and believes out of love.

Love is not an illusion, it's not a deception. It doesn't mistake beauty for dread but it sees the beauty in dread. And here I'm referring to the Cross. The apostle who sees and believes out of love is there at the Cross too. (cf. Jn 19:26) He is the only apostle on Calvary; all the others had scattered. The ten others (excluding Judas whom we believe took his own life) couldn't bring themselves to see a suffering and dying Jesus. Their eyes couldn't stand the sight.

Christian love doesn't turn a blind eye to the unpleasant and the embarrassing. It sees and beholds it. Recall that just a few days ago, in the Liturgy of the Passion on Good Friday, the priest held aloft a wooden cross and sang: "Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the world." (*Roman Missal*) Our response was not exactly timid or retiring: "Come, let us worship," we cried out. (*Roman Missal*) All these centuries later, it's easy to sing out in full measure – after all, we are just gazing on a replica of the real thing. But John saw the real thing: a real crucifixion and a real Risen Christ.

Paul of Tarsus was a man who thought he saw things accurately but he was terribly wrong about his first perception. In the Acts of the Apostles, the sacred author describes a blind Paul (cf. Acts 8-9) before his conversion. The blindness is removed when Ananias lays hands on him. (cf. Acts 9:12) Amazingly, "things like scales fell away from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized." (Acts 9:18)

What accounts for this conversion? I would suggest it is love. It is the more excellent way in Saint Paul's estimate and leads the apostle to write that magnificent ode to love in his First Letter to the Corinthians. After the wonderful description that he offers – Love is patient, love is kind . . . – he writes the following: "At present we see darkly, as if through a glass." (1 Cor. 13:12)

There is a radical incompleteness to our lives. We think we see sharply but we really don't. What the Resurrection does is allow us to see with the eyes of faith. We are given a glimpse of what is in store for those who love. For us, there is no surprise when Jesus calls loving God the greatest commandment. (cf. Matt 22:34-40) Yet, the most remarkable thing of all is not that we love God, but that He loves us first. (cf. 1 Jn 4:10)

If the Incarnation is the first installment in divine love, the Resurrection must be close to the end then. All that's left is for the Lord to give us a body on the pattern of the Son's glorified body. (cf. Phil 3:21) That is what we hope and pray for as Catholic Christians – a body on the pattern of the Son's glorified body. It is also what we catch a glimpse of in the act of Eucharistic Communion. We who receive Holy Communion worthily eat the Bread which has come down from heaven and will bring us to heaven. (cf. Jn 6:51) There isn't a more profound union with the Lord we can have now, in this life. It foreshadows the life which is ours for all eternity in heaven.

Happy Easter!

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