

Easter Sunday
4/4/2021

THE DIVINE GRAVE ROBBER

Among the most despicable things to do in life is grave robbing. What a horrible thing to do. The thought of someone doing that to our beloved dead or indeed to any of the dead can turn our stomach. Mary Magdalene found the tomb empty and thought the tomb had been robbed. And it had been robbed, but not in the way she thought.

What we celebrate today is a different type of grave robber, a divine grave robber. This grave robbery doesn't bring anguish and grief but joy and hope. Jesus' resurrection robs the grave not by taking a dead body or any items that are with it. Instead, it robs the grave by restoring the dead to new life. Jesus who once was dead now lives.

Today is a day of hope. The resurrection is about hope or it's about nothing at all. The disciples deserted Jesus. Peter denied him. Mary Magdalene didn't go to the tomb joyfully remembering Jesus' words about the resurrection. You could say they all failed and yet the message that would be given to them isn't one that berates them but encourages them. This teaches us something very important—*our failures can be overcome in Christ*.

Despite their failures, Jesus had no intention of losing his disciples and despite our failures, he doesn't want to lose us either. And the good news is that they eventually got the message and so can we. Jesus' seeming failure became a victory and source of new life and so too, our failures can lead to victory in Christ and new life. The hope of this day teaches us that even our death leads to new life.

This day marks the rebirth of hope as we realize that even death can be transformed into new life. And Jesus calls us to share in his passing over from death to new life. In baptism we share in the dying and rising of Jesus. We share in his Paschal Mystery. We're grafted onto that mystery. And in baptism, we're joined to the Church. The church isn't the Jesus Christ fan club like an Elvis fan club. Instead, in baptism we're made members of the Body of Christ with Jesus as our head.

Easter reminds us of the importance of the Church. I didn't see Jesus rise from the dead or even see him after the fact but I believe it. I believe it because there were those who saw him who told others who then told others and through the centuries someone got around to telling me. Just in the news recently, more Americans claim no church affiliation than those who do.

What I can say is that I need a church. I need *the* Church that Jesus gave to us. I need the Church to comfort me when I am down, to challenge me when I am complacent, to strengthen me when I am weak and to remind me that Jesus is risen from the dead. I need the Church because following Christ is hard and I can't do it by myself and despite human failings and even sin, the Church remains the Sacrament of Salvation given to us by Jesus. I need the Church because any mature spirituality will have a horizontal dimension or because as Pope Francis has put it, quoting his predecessor, St. Paul VI, *It is an absurd dichotomy to love Christ without the Church.*

In faith and in hope we realize that Jesus will raise us up to new life, will rob our graves and transform the tomb of death into the womb of new life. He calls us to live lives of intentional faith. Jesus didn't suffer, die and rise so that we could live lives of hit and miss faith, or lives of cultural faith but rather lives of intentional friendship with him, lives of intentional faith in every *little way*. Lives where our faith in the risen Christ is the rudder guiding the ship of our lives and where our new life is intimately connected to his new life.

Even in our failures, Jesus offers us hope. The resurrection offers us hope that goes beyond our failures and we journey to God together as a people of hope. We journey in the light of the resurrection. We journey to God in the gift extended to us by the divine grave robber.