

3d Sunday of Easter Homily given at St. Matthew Cathedral April 19, 2015 by Fr. Christopher Wyvill

There was a priest who had a good friend but was an atheist. He tried to convince him of the truth of religion and belief in God, but his friend would hear none of it. The Atheist friend became very sick, the priest visited him thinking his situation might make him more open to hearing about Jesus and God's plan for every man's salvation. His friend would not listen. When the time came for his friend in his last hours, the priest went to be with him. He was still conscious and on seeing the priest at his death bed, the sick friend asked if he was there to still try to convert him. The priest said no; I just came to see how an atheist dies.

We are free to believe or not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. His mission on earth ended by his suffering and death on a cross and burial. Peter and the other disciples of Jesus could not deny it had happened. None of them claimed to be present when Jesus rose and came out of the tomb.

To see or be told that the tomb was empty and the body gone left some believing, some baffled, like those disciples on the road to Emmaus who said to the 'stranger' who joined them: "We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free. Besides... some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and failed to find his body, but returned with the tale that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive."

Ever since Easter we have been hearing the stories of Jesus appearances to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to the apostles and others. He would mysteriously appear and disappear. He greeted them with, Peace be with you. He sometimes scolded them for not believing all that had been prophesied about him. He showed them his wounds and ate with them to convince them he was the same Jesus they had accompanied in his public ministry, yet not the same because no longer bound by space and time. He gave them the mission to be his witnesses and proclaim the good news to all nations of the salvation he had won for us all. Jesus pronounced blessed those who would believe his disciples' message and accept the gracious gift of forgiveness of sin and be freed of fear of death. Hopefully we are among those who have accepted that message with joy and thanksgiving.

Some say, however, it is easier not to believe. Then we do not have to keep all those burdensome commandments and laws. Then we can just go along with the ways of fallen human nature, not resisting the inclinations to lust, greed, deceit, jealousies, injustice, brutality, and abuses. Let's eat, drink and be merry, for

tomorrow we die. OK, you can live that way but you still have to distract yourself from the life's futility in achieving happiness and face the inevitability of dying. Many turn to drugs, porn, accumulating wealth, hoarding, and endless distraction with electronic surfing in the clouds to put off confronting their death, a fear of a possible judgment or absolute extinction.

To believe the whole story of Jesus life, death and resurrection is not easy. True, we need not be afraid of death since he has promised a life of bliss afterwards beyond our imagination. Still to accept Jesus as Lord of our life means we have to resist those inclinations of the flesh. His way is one of servanthood, of self-denial and self-giving, of obedience and compassionate generosity. When we fail to measure up to his standard of his perfect humanity, when we find ourselves giving in to the world's false ways, let's take courage in what we heard St. John say in the second reading: "I am writing this to keep you from sin. But if anyone should sin, we have, in the presence of the Father, Jesus Christ, an intercessor who is just. He is an offering for our sins...for those of the whole world."

Jesus promised his disciples that he would remain with them always. He is here in our gathering together as adopted son and daughters, as members of his body. He is hear in the proclamation of the word, and will be on the altar as we continue with the sacrifice of the Mass. It is at the Eucharist that we can enter most fully into the mystery of his offering of his body and blood so that our sins can be forgiven, making us worthy to share in the salvation he won for us. Paul tells us we should offer our bodies as a spiritual sacrifice to God along with Jesus. Then at communion we will receive from him a pledge of participation in his glorious eternal life in God. He wants to give us a joy that no one can take from us. What a gracious and loving God we worship and serve. To Father, Son and Holy Spirit be honor and glory and praise now and forever. ALLELUIA. Amen.