

Easter Day
Mt 28.1-10
March 23, 2008
Fr. M. Dow Sanderson

+++

There is hardly anything in the world more tragic than a child who has seen too much of the harsh realities of the world. Seeing too much, too soon, brings a hard edge of cynicism, and a cynical child is indeed a tragic thing.

That is why we make every effort to protect our children... to shield them. For the blessing of seeing the world through the eyes of a child is a gift to us all. A child takes delight in the smallest of things. Each new face, each color... each sound and taste is exhilarating.

It is for that reason, I believe, that Our Lord Jesus Christ told us that we had to be as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

For even the most protected child grows up eventually. And the bumps and hard knocks of life can be stern schoolmasters indeed. Our childlike nature wishes implicitly to trust... but our adult experiences of being betrayed and exploited cause us to be suspicious and wary. Our childlike curiosity leaps with joy at the simplest pleasure... But the strain, stress, and disappointments of adult life leave us grumpy, irritable, and dismissive... even of those whom we love most.

But the Kingdom of heaven is not a place for the irritable and grumpy... it is a place reserved for joy and singing and coloring outside the lines...

We know this should be true, but like Nicodemus, we are puzzled at how it is that a man should be born again when he has grown old.

How can "hearts-grown-weary" learn to sing again?

Isn't that a question for which the whole world would like an answer? For it seems to me that we have not just grumpy people, but grumpy cultures.

It is not that human nature has changed... we are the same as ever. But our ability to know so much so quickly has changed. And having eternal access to the same endless loop of bad news has not particularly blessed us.

So where might we find the answer?

And yes, that's rhetorical. We know that on Easter Sunday the preacher will tell us that the answer is Jesus.

And we smile knowingly. Of course it is. The stone was rolled away. The women dropped their flowers. The Lilies bloomed. We sang hymns. The brass band played... and we went home for a nice dinner and a Bloody Mary.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We know the story. That's Easter. It's what we do. Get on with it...

But isn't that the problem?

As Fr. Dan stated so eloquently on Good Friday... Jesus hangs on the cross...and the world passes by with indifference.

The Church proclaims the dead Lord Risen and Victorious... but has our worldly sophistication robbed us of the real joy of it?

Our faith teaches us that God, in the person of Christ Jesus, came into this world to take upon himself all the weaknesses, sin, and corruption of our human nature.

But does that include our cynicism as well? Is that something Jesus could have done for us?

There is a wonderful paragraph in Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* that describes the torment that Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. Like all Chesterton paragraphs, it is both brilliant and startling...

Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king...

In the terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. It is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God." No, but the Lord thy God may tempt himself, and it seems that this is what happened at Gethsemane. In a Garden, Satan tempted man... and in a Garden, God tempted God. He passed, in some superhuman manner, through our human horror of pessimism. When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: The cry that God had forsaken God.

And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds... and a god from all the gods... They will not find another God who has himself been in revolt. Nay, let the atheists themselves choose a god! They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation.... Only one religion where God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.

That, my brothers and sisters, is what the Lord Jesus Christ took with him into the cold, dark grave... our sin our corruption, yes... but our hardened, doubting hearts. Our cynical, pessimistic minds.

And bursting forth from that tomb, he gave us the power to live in the joy of that resurrected life.

It is not just a sentimental story. It is the truth for which countless martyrs shed their blood.

And in the blinding moment of seeing it for the first time, we may falter. Like Mary Magdalene, we may have a slight case of mistaken identity...

Until he calls us by name...

And like Mary, we may wish to cling to our former understanding...

But he gently reminds us that we have now entered into a new way of seeing, living and believing.

Last night, at the Easter Vigil, we came into the darkness of the tomb. We waited in the quiet of Death for God to act. And as we lit a fire and saw the light of resurrection come, we heard the ancient words of the Exsultet,

It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn.

May God indeed grant us a restoration of innocence...may he give us a new heart and a new mind...and the gift of Joy and Wonder in all his creation.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!