

Holy Saturday (Apr. 19, 2014)

Our sacred scripture gives us many verses that are inspiring, prayerful, consoling, challenging. There are so many that can be inspiring and may help us to pray simply by repeating them over and over. I suppose we all have our favorites, words that are inspiring, consoling, prayerful, challenging. The one that I think I like the most and that I return to over and over again is a very familiar one to all of us. It's from the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, verse 16 where Jesus says to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life."

God so loved the world. It may well be the most important statement we read in our four Gospels. It would be good for all of us to take at least a minute or two each day to remind ourselves and to thank God for His love.

It's what we celebrate every time we come to share the Eucharist and in a special way on this most holy night when the church keeps vigil and we listen prayerfully to readings that give us highlights from the story of salvation history, that call us to wonder and awe at the goodness of a God who loves us all so very, very much. From the dawn of creation when God looked on all that God had made and saw that it was very good, through the rescue of the Israelites from slavery to the resurrection of Jesus, we hear the sweep of God's dealings with humanity and the call for us to respond, to give ourselves to this good and gracious God.

We have completed our Lenten journey, we have followed Jesus to Calvary and watched him die upon the cross. As we prayed before the cross, if we listened carefully, we might have heard God say, "If ever you doubt my love for you, then look at this and be convinced of my great love." And now we celebrate the unique event that has made all the difference in the world. It's almost as though the Church says, "It's time to celebrate life." And on this blessed night and through the Easter season – indeed through the entire liturgical year – that is exactly what we do. We celebrate life and we pray about how God so loved the world

Early in the morning after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week, Matthew tells us, two of the women who had followed Jesus to the cross

now come to see the tomb. Imagine how startled they must have been when they saw the stone rolled back and an angel who told them “Do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid. But go and tell his disciples he has been raised from the dead just as he said he would. They believe. And they go to tell the disciples that he is alive. On the way they meet the risen Jesus and now they no longer simply believe. They know, for they have seen him themselves. They are now apostles, sent to bring the good news of the resurrection to others.

Dear friends, on this holy night we, too, listen once again to the word of God, and we remember, we remember what God said and did for God’s people in days of old before the time of Christ, and we remember what Jesus said and did and how he asked us to follow him. We, too, are sent as apostles, bearers of the good news, healers of the wounds and hurts of our suffering brothers and sisters. And we do not do this alone. We do it in the company of others, of the Church, of all those who remember what he said.

Tonight we welcome three catechumens to the sacrament of baptism. Kimberley, Sasha, Liz, in welcoming you to this sacrament we also welcome you to the company of the Church, to companionship with Jesus and with all of us who make up the Body of Christ. For all of us, those newly born in baptism and those grown old in our faith, baptism is a breathtaking personal gift. Any action that with one swoop of God’s hand washes away all sin, adopts us as God’s son or daughter, enrolls us in Christ’s community, and grants us on earth a title to heaven, is something to treasure. But not to clutch stingily to ourselves. Baptism sends us out on mission, commissions us to bear witness to a whole little world around us that is perhaps still looking for the living among the dead. But he is not there. He is risen as he said.

Caryll Houselander, an English spiritual writer, has a reflection on the Resurrection that says something about how we are to live the risen life. Many of you have read it I’m sure. She says this:

“Our Lord has told us how we are to lead the risen life, and he has shown it to us. . . . It is to be a life of love, love that creates, love that fills up the pressure of each life with joy. Love that is light and peace. Love that forgives and heals and sustains, that makes us one. Love that gives life to the world and beauty to life. Love that is food and clothing, and water for

thirst. Love that is bread.

“It is the love of the eternal Father for his only Son, given to us, and it is given to us for ourselves and for one another.”