

## ***“The Fear of the Lord”***

Today is a day of great celebration ..... so why does our Gospel reading end in fear? The women had gone to the tomb expecting to find Jesus' body there – after all, they'd seen Him die, and saw where He was buried. Now they come to fulfill their devotion to Jesus – treating His body with respect, as it deserves.

Yet, when they get to the tomb, there is no body to be found. Instead, a “young man dressed in a white robe” breaks the news to them. “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him?”

Don't be alarmed. Remember what He told you beforehand – that all these things would happen – that He would be put to death, and be raised to life again on the third day. Believe His Word. Go – tell His disciples. You're looking for Jesus – you'll find Him just where He has promised to be found – in Galilee.

But fear gripped these women. Fear grabbed hold of them and would not let them go. They ran away in fear, “and said nothing to anyone.”

You've heard the saying – “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.” When Pres. Roosevelt said these words, he was saying that we can't move forward if we're gripped in fear – we can't win the battle, if we're running away in fear.

But is that true? Is fear the only “threat” that is to be feared? Is fear always a bad thing? Is it the only thing that stops us from “progressing” – from winning the battle – from accomplishing what we desire? Is that the message these women at the tomb needed to hear?

The Scriptures teach us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). Fear is the realization that you are not in charge – that matters are out of your control – that there are limits to your abilities and powers – that you cannot do all things.

The “fear of the Lord” is the wisdom that comes from knowing that God is the One who is in control – that all matters are in His hands – that He can do all things – and that He works all things for the good of those who love Him. (Rom. 8:28)

Consider all the things you have feared over the past year. The fear of COVID – the fear of death – the fear of where our society is going – the fear of injustice, in equality – the fear of guns, and random violence – the fear of certain political groups or figures.

Closer to home are the fears for our families – fear that come with difficult situations – the fears that come with illnesses, disease – the fear that one day we may become a burden to our loved ones.

These fears grab hold of us and bring things to a grinding halt – causing us to cease doing the things we’ve always done – or causing us to run away from certain situations or people – or shutting our mouths, so that we do not speak to anyone.

At the empty tomb of Jesus, the women were confronted with His resurrection – with the evidence that the crucified Jesus was no longer dead, but alive. They were told where they could find this resurrected Jesus – but instead of celebrating, instead of great joy – it created fear in them.

The same thing happened when Jesus’ disciples saw Him walking on the water. The good news for them was that they need not fear the storm – they need not fear for their lives (fearing death) – for Jesus is the Lord of all creation. He is the Lord of Life, and death is powerless before Him. He overcomes death – just as He said He would.

The women recognized God’s power in all this – and that is why they were afraid. Fear seized them because all of this was out of their hands. This Jesus is not just a prophet, or a rabbi – He indeed is the Lord of all.

Fear seized them because they realized that God was dealing with them. Fear always seizes sinners when they come into contact with the Holy One of Israel. What would it mean for them to meet the Lord in Galilee? They have no control over Him.

Afterall, mankind has just put the Holy One of God to death – but now He lives! He who holds all power and might – what will He do to those who fled from Him, who failed to fight for Him?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” It is “good, right and salutary” that we should fear God, the Almighty One. It is good to see that our lives and existence are totally dependent upon Him – that we are not in control of this world, nor of Him.

He alone is in control of all things. Mankind threw everything at God – all our sin, all our evil, all our death – and God overcame. Jesus rose from death to life. That is why we are to “fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.”

All other fears that grip our lives – must be seen in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not that pandemics, family fractures, and the unknowns of life do not bring pain and suffering to our lives. There are things to be feared, like our enemies (the devil, the world, and our sinful nature) – and yet, Jesus has overcome them all! He has won the victory! They are not in charge of our lives – the Resurrected One is!

And that is why Jesus has told us ahead of time where He may be found, so that we may meet with Him. He promises to be with you when you are gathered to hear His Word – He promises to put to death your sinful nature and resurrect the new man in Holy Baptism – He promises to feed you with the Bread of Life in the Holy Supper --- so that you may not be gripped by fear, but live by faith, with the resurrected Christ.

Dearly beloved, what a healthy thing it is to “fear the Lord” – to know that all things are in the control of Him whose love and mercy has given His Son to die for you – so that you may not die, but live.

Jesus Christ has been raised to life, never to die again – and He now rules and reigns over all things for your good. Christ’s victory over death on Easter morning is your victory – over the fears you face, over the guilt of your sin, over the death that comes to all people.

In the “fear of the Lord” we rejoice and celebrate this day, and throughout all our days – for, Jesus is not dead, “He has risen” – and in Him, you have life everlasting. Amen.

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia!