

HOMILY EASTER YRC 2019

A number of years ago when my niece was about 5 or 6 years old, she was riding in the car with me and we were passing a cemetery. She pointed to the cemetery and said: “What is that.” I told her that is called a cemetery. When people die, we bury their body in a cemetery and their soul or their spirit goes to heaven.” She asked: “Is Grandma Doris buried there?” I said: No, her body is buried in another cemetery but her soul or spirit is in heaven.” Just then we passed a freshly dug grave with a large pile of dirt next to it and she said: “Look Uncle Jimmy, one of them got out!” Well, children sometimes have a different perspective.

We heard what Mary Magdalene, Peter and John thought that first Easter morning. The disciples were totally taken off guard when they found the empty tomb. They had to figure out what it meant. What we see is colored by our knowledge, our experience and our beliefs. My niece had no knowledge of a cemetery except what I just told her, so it was reasonable for her to conclude that someone got out. She would have been totally open to the Resurrection of Jesus. Mary Magdalene thought someone had taken Jesus body when she saw the empty tomb. Peter saw just the empty tomb with the burial cloths and did not know what to think. John saw the empty tomb and believed. They all saw the same thing, and empty tomb, but they all came to different conclusions. John was the beloved disciple, the one that Jesus loved. I think he had a special spiritual connection to Jesus. He concluded that Jesus rose from the dead, that Jesus was resurrected to new life as he told him he would. This was because of his spiritual connection with Jesus. He saw with the eyes of faith.

All of us are finding the empty tomb anew this Easter. What is the meaning you are finding in the empty tomb? It depends upon your knowledge of Jesus, your experience of him, your faith. We each have to find meaning in the empty tomb. We all have learned over the years that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, but what does this mean in your life? One perspective is the Jesus is far away in heaven. When things are not going right for us, we pray and ask him for what we want and if we do not get it we conclude that Jesus does not hear our prayer, he does not love us, and we have to figure it out on our own. If that is your experience, if that is what you believe, that is what you will see. You will not be open to other possibilities.

A second perspective is that Jesus is with us always, loving us and caring for us. Jesus has the power to perform miracles and sometimes does, I have seen them, but most of the time, he does not. Think of how

impossible this would be for Jesus to always give us what we want when we want it. If that were true our world would be in total chaos. Nothing would be predictable. Life would be a random set of events. And sometimes what I am praying for is contrary to what you are praying for. We could not both get what we want. Most of the time Jesus works through our human nature and I am glad that he does because it gives our lives some predictability. We are the only ones of God's creation that he made in his own image and likeness. As human beings we are unique. We have free will and he allows us to exercise it. We have the capacity to love and have the ability to decide not to love. If Jesus controlled our free will and our decision to love, we would no longer be human and made in the image and likeness of God. We would simply be acting on instinct. The free will decisions each of us makes affect the people around us. We have to live with the consequences of the free will decisions that everyone makes. That is why sometimes bad things happen to good people. Since I believe that Jesus is with me, caring for me always, when things do not go the way I want or expect, I stick with him in prayer. The prayer I am talking about is not reciting a memorized prayer; it is having a conversation with Jesus and being open to what he brings into my life. We need to develop a relationship with Jesus. I wait with him in hope that he will help me find my way through a difficult situation. We need to find the meaning in the events of our lives. We need to learn life's lessons. This is how we grow in wisdom. Jesus will help us with all of that. If we stay connected with him we can discern if we need to change our expectations or keep the course. Some of the events in our lives that seem negative are really great opportunities. Isn't it true that the greatest accomplishments in your life have some out of the greatest struggles? And the more you experience how Jesus works in your life, the easier it becomes to see it. But we must learn to see with the eyes of faith, like John the beloved disciple.

When the disciples found the empty tomb, they had to find the meaning. They had to grow in faith. They had to develop a relationship with Jesus that was very different than when he walked the earth in a human body. Mary, Peter and John were able to do that. Today I invite all of you to look at the empty tomb in a new way. Do you believe that Jesus is alive and with you loving and caring for you always? If you do your life will be filled with new possibilities.