

The angel announces to the women that Jesus has risen

Homily, 31st March, 2018

Mark 16,1-7

father G. Paparone o.p.

We listened to this long sequence of readings from the Old Testament which made us, briefly, retrace the stages of the history of salvation, the stages of God's plan, which began with creation and was fully realized with this episode, a great event of which we have listened to the account according to Mark: **the discovery of the empty tomb of Jesus.**

The whole history converges towards this central point which is the foundation of our faith.

Indeed, it does not begin with the formulation of a doctrine or because we adhere to all the statements that the *Creed* proposes to us.

Faith begins and is only possible

1. **if we trust Jesus** – because it is he who said he was the Son of God;
2. and if, subsequently, we trust the Church.

It is the Church, in fact, which affirms that Jesus is risen and that the tomb was empty.

Last night we also saw a beautiful film, which I recommend everyone to see: “Risen”, where the director with great theological and spiritual acumen was able to grasp the perspective from which one must start to adhere to the faith: **this empty tomb.**

We believe, because someone has seen.

But, what did he see?

He saw an empty tomb. He saw that the body of Jesus was no longer there in the tomb.

This evening, however, I would like to make another type of reflection; you may have already heard all these truths many times, however, what I will tell you I hope will be a new suggestion.

The Gospel of St. Mark in this account, which all four evangelists transmit to us, underlines an aspect of its own: in the morning the women go to the tomb and as they walk, they say: *who will roll back the stone for us?* The stone is big, we are four women, small, weak, how are we going to anoint the body?

I invite you to realize the paradox: the women saw Jesus placed in the tomb, they saw this huge boulder that sealed the entrance, yet in the morning they left with the oils to anoint the body, and, as they walk, they ask themselves: but how are we going to anoint the body? *Who will roll back the stone for us?*

Then, when they arrive, they see that the boulder had been rolled away.

Do we understand, then, **what is faith?**

Faith is: to set out.

The faith of Abraham, who had set out on his way to a place he did not know, the faith of Abraham who took Isaac to sacrifice him, and when Isaac asked: but where is the lamb? Abraham told him not to worry, God will provide.

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Here, dear ones, **faith is believing, having the trust, the certainty that God is present, that God intervenes, that God can provide.**

This faith is the more certain the more the concrete existential conditions we live seem to contradict this truth.

Because, if this were not the case, we could have doubts, thinking that maybe things shouldn't have gone that way...

A simple example to understand this aspect: we pray for it to rain; well, then it happens that it really rains and we think that, in any case sooner or later, it would have rained anyway, even if we hadn't prayed.

If, however, events occur as happened to Sarah who fathered Isaac when he was ninety, you understand that there is no discussion or reasoning to be done there.

Faith is believing. Believing that God exists, and that he is not a spectator who watches our small actions from the top of his throne, as many of us imagine.

The Incarnation tells us that God entered history to walk with us, and the salvation he wants to give us we receive it to the extent that we walk with him and go where He wants to lead us, doing what He suggests we do.

St. Paul expresses it in a theologically perfect way, in the letter to the Romans, which is the theological and spiritual synthesis of the great apostle.

He recalls: *Those who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death, through him we were buried with him into death.*

For us this verse may seem almost incomprehensible: *we too were buried in death*; but how? When?

We must think that Baptism requires, in an adult and aware person, the explicit will to deny creaturehood, the world of sin, the limits, the renunciation of all that seems only of this world, in order to **"putting on Christ"**.

When Baptism was celebrated by ablution, by immersion, it was like a new birth; that is, the man who, after the preparation of the catechumenate, had decided to become a Christian, therefore wanting to live as Christ taught, ritually entered the waters and in this gesture decided he wanted to die to sin and to the flesh.

The rite symbolically expresses returning to the womb and leaving it to live a new life.

The sacraments communicate the *grace* of the risen Christ.

The blood and water that flow from the side of the crucified Jesus are the symbol of the Sacraments, a symbol of the communication of *grace*; from this water and this blood we are regenerated for walking in a new life.

Those who received Baptism as a child obviously could not make this spiritual act of determining themselves and saying: from now on I want to be Christ's only, I want to abandon this world and live with Christ.

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I don't know how many parish priests then help to make believers become adults in the faith, or if they take it for granted that people know that they must die to sin and live a new life; or, if they are satisfied that the faithful put into practice more or less the Ten Commandments...

If so, we “are massacring” our faith...

As we become adults humanly and psychologically, **we must also become adults Christianly and spiritually.**

Adult is the one who decides to be in the world as a disciple of Jesus, as a child of God.

As Christ was raised from the dead we too can walk in a new life: this is what **Baptism** represents.

Easter, therefore, is God's gift to each of us to walk in a new life.

But how do we do it? Some of you are wondering.

We do like Mary of Magdala and like James' mother, who set out and say: “someone will move the stone”.

Someone will move the stone!

We are asked to trust, to desire, to want.

Like these women, who did not stay in bed disconsolate on Sunday morning, they did not feel sorry for themselves because Jesus was dead, because they were disappointed.

They left with the oils to anoint him, so they didn't think in the least that he was risen; do you understand what is the magnitude of this resurrection event? It is totally unexpected and unexpected even by the friends of the Lord.

Easter day describes to us the fact that there is the Resurrection, an event that no one expected, but the women did what was in their power, they showed their love for Jesus, they showed all their capacity, desire and willingness to be with him.

Women, instead of standing there crying on each other, as perhaps we do, spending a good part of our life doing it, have taken the oils to say goodbye to Jesus, to express their love, their affection, their devotion.

There must be something in life that is not simply rational, scientific, perfect, proven, which does not correspond exactly to our way of seeing. We must give an opening to the transcendent, to the mystery, to the divine.

In one of the previous readings, God, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, says: *My thoughts are not your thoughts*; how, then, can we meet God if we do not want to get out of our thoughts, our schemes, our logics?

We too can say: *Who will roll the stone for us?*

Who will take away the rock of our sins, of our habits, of our failures, of our incapacities, of our miseries?

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Who will be able to change this heart?

We also heard it from the prophet Ezekiel: **it is God who came precisely to change our hearts, to give us his *grace*. We are asked to have faith, to trust, to believe beyond appearances.**

We too, dear ones, with Mary Magdalene, Mary of James, Salome, we buy aromatic oils and go to look for Jesus, at least every Sunday.

Praise to the Lord Jesus Christ