

EASTER
SUNDAY

"Noli me tangere"





EASTER SUNDAY

Year A

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-9

Gathering

(A new, unlit white or yellow candle, a baptismal garment, some seasonal fresh flowers and a bible opened to this week's gospel rest on a table covered with a white or yellow cloth.)

Mary comes to the tomb and discovers it is empty. Has someone stolen the body and desecrated Jesus' grave? The burial cloths are there, but the cloth that covered Jesus' face is rolled up in a separate place. What does all this mean? This week we reflect on the meaning of the Easter proclamation that Jesus was raised from the dead. We stood this past week at the cross of Jesus. How have you died to self for the sake of others during this past season of Lent?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members join in singing "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today". The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the prayer continues.)

Leader: Christians, to the Paschal Victim

Offer your thankful praises!

All: A Lamb the sheep redeems;
Christ, who only is sinless,
Reconciles sinners to the Father.

Leader: Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:
The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.

All: Speak, Mary, declaring
What you saw, wayfaring.

Leader: “The tomb of Christ, who is living,
The glory of Jesus’ resurrection;

All: Bright angels attesting,
The shroud and napkin resting.

Leader: Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;
To Galilee he goes before you.”

All: Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.
Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!
Amen. Alleluia.

The Easter Sequence

HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites

members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

You are entering another dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind; a wondrous land of imagination; that's a sign post up ahead for the Twilight Zone. This TV series that aired in the 1960's proffered a mysterious world that was different than we could ever imagine.

The Easter gospel ushers us in real life into a realm we could have never imagined. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week. There was no Jesus, just an empty tomb, empty wrappings and the cloth that covered Jesus' face in a place by itself. What gives? We are in the realm of mystery, the mystery of God and God's action in the world. We believe and understand to a point, but there is so much more to the mystery!

This is "the first day of the week," we are told. This is John's way of alluding to the first creation account in Genesis. What we now encounter is God's new creation in the resurrection of Jesus. A crucified man was raised! God's anointed is not an earthly *conqueror*, but one who died in surrender to his Father in trust that he would be vindicated. In this raising of Jesus, God declares to all people that the life, and self-emptying love of Jesus, reveals who God is, what God is all about, and who we are meant to be. All that Jesus stood for and proclaimed, the Father identifies with, i.e., forgiveness, mercy, compassion, justice, peace, and reconciliation grounded in *agape*, the love with which God loves.

Experienced in the present in the Spirit of the risen Christ, our resurrection hope anticipates the future of the fullness of the kingdom. Living in such hope is living in the *already* and *not yet* of the kingdom of God. Living in the transforming power of resurrection hope, we dedicate ourselves in the imitation of Christ to promote a more just, peaceful and loving world.¹

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ When have you experienced getting another chance in life?
- ◆ Describe a time in your life when God surprised you.

¹ For further reading: Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, (New York; Crossroad Publishing, 1981. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, (London: SCM Press, 2002). N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (New York: Harper One, 2008).

- ◆ Describe a time in your life when you *saw* and *believed*.
- ◆ When have experiences of new life deepened your understanding and relationship with God?
- ◆ How do you live resurrection hope?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Set aside ten minutes each day this week to reflect on where God is drawing you to embrace resurrection hope more fully, and to find places where new life is yearning to be realized in your relationships.
- ◆ Read, *We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah*, issued by the Vatican in 1998 (www.vatican.org). Let it lead you to imagine some concrete steps your community or parish can take locally to strengthen and enrich Catholic-Jewish relations.
- ◆ Put resurrection hope to work in our larger world by learning how you might help to transform the present nuclear threat to the world. Sign up with Safer World Action Network (www.nti.org) and get regular updates on the work of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader

invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment. Following this sharing, the leader and six members of the group lead the community in prayer as follows.)

Leader: Good and gracious God, help us to understand:

I: Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience.
It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in us.

II: Living in resurrection hope, we cannot put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it, and work with God and others to transform it.

III: Peace with you Lord sometimes means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.

IV: Help us to experience the deep serenity of the presence of the Father's Kingdom in the midst of life's challenges. We are hastening towards your future when we anticipate the righteousness and justice; a new and enduring earth is to come into being.

V: Not to take things as they are but to see them as they can be in the future, and to bring about this can be in the present, means living up to the future.

VI: Help us to know the restlessness within that comes from the knowledge that your kingdom is still coming and that we are called to help you, with others, to make it real in our world.¹

All: We pray in the name of our Lord and Brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Members toast the Risen Lord with some sparkling beverage.)

¹ Adapted from Jurgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), p.8 and, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p.21