

+ J. M. J.

The Church helps us meditate on this image of an empty tomb. We can put ourselves in the place of Mary of Magdala, Simon Peter, and the other disciple. We visit our love ones in the cemetery to pray, to remember, and to feel connected to someone we love. What would it be to come to that grave and find it disturbed and our loved one missing. We would be enraged and distraught to the point of being inconsolable. If we consider those emotions we can start to enter into that first day sadness turned into Easter glory.

I had a good friend whom I helped move so that he could take a job in Boston. A little while later I received a message from him through our company's email that he would like to meet for lunch. Thinking this was some elaborate prank I played along and agreed to meet him. He was there; he had returned to work for our company and just kept it a secret to surprise me. Overjoyed does not begin to describe my disposition. Imagine then what it would be like to see the empty tomb and then come to realize the unthinkable had happened. Jesus had risen after that unbearable scene days ago.

For millennia the sign of the empty tomb has provided incomparable hope for Christians. Life was difficult for the majority of those people through the years. They had an acute understanding that Jesus' resurrection guaranteed their resurrection following their bodily death, so they expectantly hoped for something beyond the drudgery, the toil, and their hard living. There were stories of great witnesses to the faith, martyrs who would give their lives because they knew Jesus and they knew they belonged to a heavenly kingdom and come what may this world was passing away. There were stories of saints who were heroic in their virtues because they knew and loved Christ and they lived so to gain merit in the heavenly kingdom.

Recently we have been blessed to live in a prosperous society in a prosperous time. For the most part we don't worry about where our next meal will come from or will we succumb to disease this year. We are quite comfortable and can easily get caught up in the living of here and now with all its concerns

that may not translate to the concerns of eternal life. Thinking about here distracts us from preparing for our death and resurrection. Isn't it interesting that in this short reading three times St. John makes mention of the burial cloths? These cloths would have adhered to the body because of the amount of that sticky myrrh that would have been applied. They are neatly cast aside because a resurrected body has no need of clothing. We take none of our material things with us when we go to the grave. None.

There is only one thing that we take. What we take are the virtues that we cultivated and built up in this lifetime. St. Paul tells us **"If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above... Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."** We have been raised with Christ when we were baptized. Today we will renew our baptismal promises, to reject sin and the reject the glamour of evil. It is easy to say "I do" to these questions, but our "I do" means that we are promising to God to go out into the world and live free of sin and evil. To believe means that not only we express our beliefs, but we go out into the world and we live Christian lives. We reject entertainment that conflicts with the Gospel, gossip, and all things that are contrary to the kingdom of God. We are to be very different from the passing things of this world. To believe means that we act according to our beliefs, and as St. Peter says **"everyone who believes in [Jesus] will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."** We go out and care for those around us, the hungry, the homeless, and the sick because Jesus told us to. We should be striving to acquire that virtue the martyrs and saints acquired. When we believe in this way our lives are transformed into Christ's life. That is very important for St. Paul tells us **"When Christ your life appears then you too will appear with him in glory."**

The alternative is to be stuck in the here and now without reference to what is of above. Those who do not believe in Christ through their actions when they die will stand without virtue before him, naked. Christ is our hope. Christ is risen. From this moment on let us strive to live every moment of our lives in that reality so that we may be clothed in virtue at our resurrection and be ushered into God's glory.