

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

5 Lent
March 9, 2008
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Laus Deo!”

The Gospel of John has over the last few weeks been building in momentum. From turning water into wine, to calming the sea, to caring for the blind man, Jesus has demonstrated that he is from above and he is the promised Messiah.

His followers believe. His disciples are convinced; his apostles are sure that they know who this man is. What happens next; the story we read in today’s Gospel, arrives like a thunderbolt and shocks everyone who saw and experienced it into utter silence and awestruck wonder. Christ alone, standing before a tomb of a man dead four days, raises him from the dead.

This Gospel should strike each one of us with the same awesome force. There is nothing compromising about this miracle. There is no room for doubt by any of the by-standers, scribes or Pharisees. In the witness of this one act everyone knows they know who he is and they know it as a certainty.

Scholars tell us that it is from this one incident the raising of Lazarus that the Jewish leaders began to plot the death of Jesus. It is a common denominator down the centuries, that men of power cannot live with too much goodness.

It might be understandable, if after 2000 years this miracle does not have the visual impact that it had with the Apostles. I would only recommend that you watch Zefferelli’s 1974, 12 part “Jesus of Nazareth”. It is probably one of the great masterpieces of our time. It is true to the Gospel account and enormously inspirational. It depicts the distress of Jesus at the loss of his friend. He stands alone in deep prayer and raises his eyes to the heavens. He raises his right hand and calls out: “Lazarus come out.”

The camera pans around and records the expression on every face before it sweeps to the entrance of the tomb where the mummified figure of Lazarus stands filling the doorway. Jesus says: “Unbind him and let him go.”

Modern scholars in the 1960’s were fond of trying to give modern rational explanation for so much that was miraculous in the Gospels.

What could they possibly do with this story? The man was dead. He was four days in the tomb. The Gospel writer goes to pains, to give every detail of the story right down to the dialogue that is exchanged with Jesus.

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There are only two ways to go with this story. You can disbelieve it and agree with the Pharisees that Jesus was a liar and a cheat and deserves to be crucified. Or you can choose to believe it, in which case Jesus is who he said he was and is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Believe that and your whole life has to change. Believe that then Jesus Christ becomes the number one central focus of your life. Believe that and miracles and healings do not surprise you. As Paul says: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his spirit that dwells in you."

You and I have so much in common with Paul because we were not there either. Like Paul we grew to know Christ through others. Yet, Paul's life is totally transformed; he becomes Apostle, teacher, preacher, healer and missionary overnight. He sleeps and lives telling the Jesus story. He travels, journeys, relentlessly. He is shipwrecked, imprisoned, beaten and humiliated. Yet, nothing can quench the fire that is in him. It is the fire of the Gospel. It is the fire of the Holy Spirit and with Paul it never goes out.

You and I have also received this fire. We received it first at Baptism and irrespective of our age it worked its grace within us. We are here today because of God's grace. We are not on death row, in prison on a drug addict, on the streets of New York. We are here because the grace of the Spirit had brought us here. We are here because our God has a plan and we, you and I are part of it. Perhaps, it is to help save one person. Perhaps it is to reach out to many. It is a sober thought that Christ's salvation to one individual depends on what we do with the grace God gave to us.

Have you ever been in the presence of someone who is very sick, even terminally sick? Have you ever been tempted to reach out and rest your hand upon them and pray: "Holy Spirit, Lord of life, heal this good person and restore them to health I ask this in Jesus' name."

If that person were healed the next day would you consider yourself a healer or a miracle worker? Of course not. "If you believe you will see the glory of God." And if the person died would you consider Christ a failure. Absolutely not, for Christ came to show us a way to the Father, a way through pain, away through death. Christ came for the sick and the failure that they may experience God's glory.

That glory was proclaimed in America's prayer which reads:

"Almighty God, We make our earnest prayer that thou wilt keep the United States in thy holy protection; that thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow

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citizens of the United States at large. And finally that thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the divine author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord," Amen.

Do you know who composed and penned those words? George Washington, the first president of the United States of America wrote those words. This was his prayer for America. They are as applicable today as they were 220 years ago.

The founding fathers knew what so many have today forgotten, that praise and glory belong to God and that is why we serve.

Every nation and empire that has neglected or forgotten that God is the author of life and the creator of good has founded in a mire of it sown making. Whether it was the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire or the Communist regime all have fallen under the weight of their own sin and corruption. As a nation and in our personal lives, we cannot afford to do the same.

Did you know that Pierre Charles L'Enfant the Frenchman who designed Washington our capital, designed it in the shape of a perfect cross with the White House to the North; the Jefferson Memorial to the south, the Capitol to the East and the Lincoln Memorial to the West and in the center the mighty Washington memorial 555 feet high. Inscribed on its top the two words Laus Deo. "Praise be to God."

We praise God with our lives because he has been revealed to us through the word of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He has called us to holiness of life, to be a holy people, set apart. He has called us to be a Godly nation. In this time of political elections that should give all of us something to think about.

Who will keep us on the path of righteousness? Who will give the glory of God and walk his ways?

As we approach Calvary and the Holiest week of our year let us too pause to give glory to God in our life and say: "Laus Deo!" Praise be to God!

Amen+

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