

EXAMINING THE WORD

FIRST READING: Acts 10:34a, 37–43

Most missionary speeches by Peter and Paul in the book of Acts (chapters 2, 4, 10, 13, and 17) culminate in a significant reminder of Jesus' life and ministry in Galilee and Judea and of his Passion and death in Jerusalem, and with a resounding profession of faith in his resurrection. Today's reading is taken from the first of these missionary speeches in Gentile territory, in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea. The good news of the resurrection of Christ is not meant to be kept within a small circle of initiated, and is good news not only for Judeo-Christians, but for all the "devout and God-fearing." It must be shared and proclaimed. Peter claims highly the apostles' status as privileged "witnesses, chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." He thus highlights the greatness of the gift that was made to them to be so intimately associated to the great mystery of the Incarnation and yet to be completely transformed, not by wishful thinking, but by their genuine experience of eating and drinking with their Risen Lord. The reference to "eating and drinking" is quite appropriate on Easter Sunday to remind us that we, as a eucharistic people, also experience the same privilege.

SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1–4

Paul has brilliantly and convincingly proclaimed the foundational mystery of the Resurrection of Christ. He is also good at spelling out the consequences such mystery has for ourselves and for the world. For him, the Resurrection of Christ is not to be confined to a one-time event from the past, but is to be understood as a mystery bearing fruits for today. Jesus has been raised from the dead: this is *the* good news that illuminates the whole New Testament. But it's far from being the end of the story: We are part of the mystery as well. Yet, Paul has to write to the Colossians "if you have been raised with Christ..." The "if" implies that we remain free to believe and that the Resurrection of Jesus will shine in all its brightness when we start to "seek what is above." We are one with Christ and we receive life from his resurrection. But the question is: Do we really live as people who have been raised with him?

GOSPEL: John 20:1–9

Once again (as in the March 9 gospel on the blind man), the vocabulary of vision and sight is prominent

in this gospel reading (verses 1, 5, 6, 8): the liturgical translation, however, has used only one verb to render three different Greek verbs. The first one, in verses 1 and 5 is *blepô*, which would have the shade of meaning "to catch a glimpse of," as it were, instant and furtive visual perception. The second one, in verse 6, is *theoreô* and conveys the idea of *observation*, calling for reflection and further investigation. And the last one (verse 8) is the most common verb *oraô* for *seeing*, except that for John it often has the more profound meaning, like here, of *spiritual sight* and is naturally associated with *believing*. So through Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple, we are given three different reactions to the finding of the empty tomb and three different ways of coming to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

First comes Mary Magdalene. She comes to the tomb and *sees* "that the stone had been removed from the tomb." Far from accepting the resurrection of Jesus, she assumes that some unidentified visitors have taken the body away to some other, yet unknown place. So she finds the tomb empty and chooses to refer immediately to Peter and to the beloved disciple. She will come to believe only after she actually meets Jesus in person (see verses 11-18).

Then come Peter and the beloved disciple. The beloved disciple outruns Peter: without entering into the tomb: he *sees* the burial cloths lying there, but refrains from entering the tomb. It's not instantaneous faith even for him. Peter comes after him, but is first to enter into the tomb. He too "saw the burial cloths there" and the shroud. But he remained intrigued and perplexed. Finally, the disciple whom Jesus loved enters the tomb. "He saw and believed," says the evangelist, though not without adding that "they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

Neither the stone removed, nor the empty tomb, nor the burial cloths and shroud can bring anyone to confirm the resurrection of Jesus. The beloved disciples' journey is more ideal or virtual than historical. Most of the time, a message from heavenly messengers will give them a hint, but the decisive and ultimate factor will be for all of them the personal encounter with the Risen Lord. Yet there is no way we can bypass the experience of the empty tomb. If the disciples had wished to hide anything, they wouldn't have mentioned their tardiness in believing. But the fact that the four evangelists record an empty tomb story is a precious indication about the historicity not of the Resurrection as such but of the coming to faith of the disciples.