**Homily for Easter Sunday**

**April 4, 2021**

**St. Bavo Parish**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

*First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43 (Testimony to Jesus’ resurrection.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 118 (This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.)*

*Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4 (Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.)*

*Gospel: John 20:1-9 (The empty tomb.)*

Throughout the year, at almost every single mass, *Jesus* is the main character in the gospel reading. After all, the gospel is the story of Jesus’ life. We would expect him to be the center of attention every time. So, throughout the year, we follow the events of his life and ministry. During Holy Week, we recall the events leading up to his death. And, throughout the Easter Season, we will hear numerous stories about his post-resurrection appearances. But on Easter Sunday, when we commemorate the greatest moment in all of human history, the day that Jesus rose victorious from the dead, he is nowhere to be found. Apparently, there were no eyewitnesses to the Resurrection, and Jesus never bothered to tell anyone what happened to him that first Easter morning. So, today we are left with nothing but an empty tomb. And yet, like the Beloved Disciple standing in the midst of that empty tomb, *we believe*.

Today the Beloved Disciple takes center stage. Traditionally, he has been identified with the author himself, St. John the Apostle. However, he is never named. John always refers to him simply as, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” In reality, he may be more of an idea than a real person, a symbolic character rather than one of the twelve apostles. Whenever the Beloved Disciple appears on the scene, he shows us how an *ideal* disciple should respond to that situation. And, unfortunately, his ideal response often contrasts markedly with those of the other disciples.

For example, in John’s Passion Narrative, which we heard on Good Friday, after Jesus drops the bombshell that one of the men sitting around the table with him at the Last Supper is going to betray him, all the other disciples break into hysterics, wondering how anyone could possibly do such a thing. But, the Beloved Disciple reacts very differently. He leans his head against Jesus’ chest, in a gesture of great intimacy, and asks who it is. If all of the disciples had been so close to Jesus, perhaps the events of Good Friday might have played out very differently.

Later, when Jesus is on trial before the religious authorities, Peter famously denies him three times. According to the other three gospels, Peter is the only one there, because all the other disciples had fled in fear. But John places the Beloved Disciple in the scene to show us what all of the disciples *should have done*. While the others run and hide, and Peter denies knowing Jesus, and then goes out and weeps bitterly, the Beloved Disciple *remains* and keeps vigil. He is unafraid to be counted among Jesus’ friends and followers.

All three of the other gospels also show Jesus dying on the cross with only his mother and some other women to accompany him. Once again, John places the Beloved Disciple there, where *all of the disciples* should have been. Jesus even commends him to his mother, indicating that Mary would become the mother of *all* of Jesus’ faithful disciples. Hence, in that instance, the Beloved Disciple represents not only the *ideal* disciple, but also the *whole community of disciples* who would one day claim the title of “Christian.”

Today’s gospel, however, shows the Beloved Disciple in his finest hour. Three disciples encounter the same empty tomb on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene sees the condition of the tomb, and she assumes that someone has stolen the body. Peter enters the tomb and looks around, and he is simply bewildered. The Beloved Disciple enters the tomb, sees the very same thing that Peter and Mary Magdalene saw, and he *believes*.

In this character of the Beloved Disciple, we see the faith of the Church, the faith of countless Christians throughout the centuries, who have believed without the benefit of seeing. The keys to that belief, however, can be found in the other stories featuring the Beloved Disciple. Our faith will remain strong if we seek the kind of intimacy with Jesus that he demonstrates at the Last Supper. For him, Jesus is not just a teacher and master, but a close, intimate friend. So he must be for us. In addition, we must be willing to stand up and be counted among Jesus’ followers, even when doing so may be countercultural, unpopular, or even dangerous. And, we must be willing to suffer with and for Jesus, remembering how he gave everything for us.

Perhaps the real reason why John never identified the Beloved Disciple is because he wanted *us* to identify with him. He wanted all of us, who believe in Jesus and his Resurrection, to see *ourselves* as the disciples whom Jesus loves *today*.