



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City**

EASTER SUNDAY HOMILY

St. Paul Church, Belle Fourche, SD

April 8, 2012

Last night at the Easter Vigil Mass at the Cathedral, we sat and listened to the stories in Sacred Scripture of those who have gone before us in faith, of those who wandered from God and were led back, of those who turned away in sin and were called back through forgiveness and new life, of those who dared to have dreams and how those dreams were fulfilled! Dreams of a Messiah coming out of a world seeped in darkness and suffering.

Fr. Raymond Brown says, *“Darkness will last until someone believes in the risen Jesus.”* God lit a fire, and the whole Church burst forth into light. The Easter fire last night recalled for us that essential fire which God lit in the Resurrection of his Son. I couldn't help to think “what a wonderful story of love and faith.”

But as we sat and listened to their stories, we were reminded that we too, have a story to tell. We too, have a story of being created people who are “GOOD”; we too, have a story that involves an experience of new life in Baptism; we too, have a story that involves wandering away and being led back. Our story too, is about faith. We are here today because we have faith, a faith that has come from a personal story of God's love in our own lives.

So as we gather today, we want to be mindful of our own story of salvation and how God has entered into our own lives through the covenant He made with us in Baptism, and how He continues to offer us new life in Jesus. What a story each of has to tell!!

The story of Resurrection, this Easter event, gives each of us the focus to live out the rest of our story, a story that is still unfolding for each of us. For the disciples who really believed, Christ's Resurrection changed everything for them. It was the turning point in their lives. And it changes everything for us.

Our Holy Father proclaimed: *“Faith in the resurrection of Jesus says that there is a future for every human being; the cry for unending life which is a part of the person indeed answered. Through Jesus we do know ‘the room where exiled love lays down its victory.’ He himself is the place, and he calls us to be with him and dependent upon him. He calls us to keep this place open within the world so that he, the exiled love, may reappear over and over in the world....God exists; that is the real message of Easter. Anyone who even begins to grasp what this means also knows what it means to be redeemed.”*

In our culture today, Easter has become a sentimental holiday. We have tamed it. Easter is associated with colored Easter eggs and Easter eggs hunts. We have Easter bunnies and jelly beans and Easter bonnets. Something far different than what Mary, Peter and John experienced at the empty tomb!

But what seemed at first glance to be disappointment may be the very signs of new life. In believing in the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene and John and Peter embrace the truth of God's love despite all evidence to the contrary. As one author states, "*The world offers precious little to convince us of the existence of the Kingdom of God.*" So often, what we see speaks of condemnation and death. Just look at the problems in the Middle East and around the world; look at the violence all around this country; look at the many forms of suffering everywhere. So many places throughout the world give no evidence to resurrected life.

The proof of the Resurrection lies in the "empty tomb" and the post-Resurrection appearances recorded in the Gospels. And we accept this on faith. But to believe, to honestly and truly believe, put us right there, in this Easter story, peering into a dark and empty space and seeing the possibility of eternity. It is looking into the empty tombs of our life and finding signs of new life.

We know from the experiences of our own lives that where Jesus has been with us, there is life, not death and decay. "*We will find him: wherever stones have been rolled back and barriers torn down; where those who thought life had ended for them, and are given hope. Jesus is with his living witnesses feeding the hungry, raising up the disheartened, nursing the injured, being the voice of the voiceless. He is living within us when we turn from what is destructive in our lives, headed for a dead end, when we have the courage to forgive one another, and when we gather strength to begin anew. Jesus is not found among the dead, but among the living.*"

Lives that are changed today give evidence of the Risen Christ among us. As we reflect upon our own stories, as I reflect upon my own story and my life's experience, where I was before and where I am now, it is in the midst of my own story that I have discovered the Resurrection.

As we reflect upon our own stories and look into the darkness of the empty tomb and into the darkness of our world and the darkness of our own lives, "*are you and I going to be able to say, 'Yes, I see the darkness, but....' After the 'but' comes our proclamation of faith. We make the leap into darkness, trusting that Jesus has been raised up and that we too will be raised. The waters poured over us at baptism have given us "night vision" – we can see by God's light in the darkness. We peer into the dark and see a future that is bright, shining through the darkness.*"

That future is filled with the radiant vision of the God's glory because being empowered by His Spirit, we work in the surrounding darkness to manifest the Kingdom of God for which Jesus died by healing the sick, forgiving those who have offended us, raising up those burdened, and setting free those who are oppressed.

Either the world is left with an empty tomb, or Jesus' disciples make His presence known through how we gather as his community of sisters and brothers to break the Bread and share the Cup, and how we proclaim His Gospel to the world through our words and our example of His love.

Yes, the world may seem quite dark at times, but thanks to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can see quite clearly: we can see how much God loves us. In the light of Easter glory, we can see far beyond the walls of this church or our own private space – we see the needs of our sisters and brothers and the path we must follow to help them through their darkness. This is part of our salvation story, past, present and the future to come.

We weren't there on that first Easter morning with Mary Magdalene, Peter and John, peering into the empty tomb and seeing signs of resurrection. But we are here now as beneficiaries of the life and love that emerges from Christ's death.

We come here today in faith because, like the disciples, we too are in amazement, in amazement, and yet in gratitude for what God has given us in Christ's victory over sin and death. But we also come to His table today, and share in the meal that Jesus gives us for our journey, the very gift of Himself.

My dear friends, Jesus is risen! He is right here!