

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord | For Sunday, April 17, 2022

The Mission Did Not Fail!

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Colossians 3:1-4 or

I Corinthians 5:6b-8

John 20:1-9



You've had the vision in your mind for quite a while. You've found the perfect place to build a seasonal garden with a fountain. Excited to bring your vision to life, you painstakingly design the plans, secure all the materials, purchase a stunning fountain, and clear your schedule to complete it. As you begin preparing the land, you realize there is one thing you failed to consider: the magnitude and density of boulders, as solid as blocks of concrete, preventing you from doing anything! Unable to even insert the spade into the ground, you are left dumbfounded, angered, and disappointed, wondering whether you will ever realize your vision. Boulders can weigh things down, block things off, prevent movement, and stymie the achievement of dreams. They are also the perfect way to seal a tomb.

Many boulders weigh us down. They suffocate us, closing off the tombs of our lives from light, fresh air, change, and freedom. The boulders we carry are like heavy sacks piled on our backs, causing our heads to hang low, and impeding our journey. They can cripple us, lead us to depression, rob us of joy, and hold us captive. Such boulders have the potential to seal shut the doors of our lives. They come from many different places: dysfunctional home environments, business responsibilities, economic pressures, relationships, physical or mental illness, loss, disappointment, guilt, addictions, the effects of war, violence, and suffering to name a few. Some folks carry more burdens than others. They are hard to shoulder, and we often find ourselves powerless over them.

As we celebrate Easter, we see a world torn apart by war and its accompanying ugliness: bloodshed, violence, separation, loss, and grief. And we begin to wonder how somebody moves forward in times like these. Stripped of all they possess, what gives them hope? After being forced to witness the brutal killings of those they love, what keeps them going? And this is only one example of the world's suffering. There are many others who are victims of other wars, famine, disease, exploitation, greed, power, and domination. What motivates them to start another day, knowing that the boulders are still closing them off from life?

Stuck with our burdens, we can believe that we failed. Powerless and tired, do we give up and admit defeat? It seemed like Jesus failed. His lifeless body was placed in a tomb and sealed up. His friends tried to understand

what had happened. Wasn't something spectacular supposed to occur to show everyone that he was telling the truth? After all, doesn't God part the seas, have manna flow down from heaven, save people from floods and help people get to more productive and abundant lands? Good Friday seems so final and dark, just like we feel when left carrying something that weighs us down, there is no life, no freedom, and no love. Or so it seems.

The disciples invested in Jesus. They trusted. You can imagine the disappointment, despair, anger, frustration, and fear they must have felt. After all that transpired, there they sat glumly staring at a boulder. Waiting is difficult, especially when facing an apparent brick wall, uncertain of what comes next. It's frightening and chilling. We feel the same way when we look at the boulders that seal up and weigh down our fragile, struggling lives. Where are you, God? Didn't you promise that you would be here to help? Listen?

The disciples experienced many emotions, even painful anger, doubt, and fear. And then, "Life" found them! Miraculously, the stone was rolled away from the tomb, and life flowed out! Amid life's unfolding, a Presence came to them and said, "It is I. Do not be afraid. Believe." The author of faith, love, and hope revealed himself to them and touched their soul in a way that only Truth can touch. They changed. It happened just as Jesus said: He is risen! Alleluia! And, even more profoundly as they reflected on the heavy stone, discussed all that happened, shared their feelings, and tried to comprehend what they had seen and heard, Jesus joined them. When they stopped for a rest and broke bread, they knew it was him.

Pope Benedict XVI shares that "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 is indeed answered. 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." There is a future. Ponder for a moment the most significant stone or boulder in your life. Do you believe you have a future despite what is before your eyes? When Life Eternal touched the disciples, they were transformed. No longer were their eyes cast down or gazing in the past; they saw the future. God always brings life.

Many of the metaphorical boulders and stones that hinder us are fixable. Others we can manage. Some require the help and support of those around us so that we can accept and carry them with grace. Allow Life Eternal, Christ, to touch your soul today. The attitudes we bring to our challenges, how we see God, the depth of our trust, and how deeply we can love are the things that matter. If we truly believe that God has all things in his care and that there is a future filled with life, love, and joy, then we can change and forge ahead. We can also be moved to accept the stones and boulders that cannot be changed and work around them.

PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God,
Father of all,
Creator and Ruler of the Universe,
Lord of History,
whose designs are inscrutable,
whose glory is without blemish,
whose compassion
for the errors of men is inexhaustible,
in your will is our peace.

Help us to be masters of the weapons
that threaten to master us.
Help us to use our science
for peace and plenty,
not for war and destruction.

Show us how to use atomic power
to bless our children's children,
not to blight them.

Grant us to seek peace where it is truly found!

In your will, O God, is our peace! Amen.

(Thomas Merton, *A Book of Hours*)

The joy and beauty of the resurrection become real when we open our eyes to see the bigger picture that God has planned for all of us. Our destiny is to be one with Christ. It is our future. When we lose focus and become discouraged, apathetic, overwhelmed, defeated, and disgusted, we lose touch with those gifts we need the most: faith, hope, and love. These virtues supported the disciples during their darkest hours. They can get us through ours as well.

God does not abandon his people. He places within us the light and power of his love. When we listen, undistracted by other pleasures and desires, we hear that voice encouraging us to move forward. There is a future. Human beings inherently want to live and love. This is the presence of the Risen Christ, the Word made Flesh, the One without beginning or end, alive in the hearts of all of God's children. There is a future, and it is a bright one indeed! Alleluia!

Fr. Mark Suslenko