

21 April 2019, 8.00 a.m. | **EASTER SUNDAY** (Year C)

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 | Psalm 118 | Colossians 3:1-4 | John 20:1-9

THE SHEPHERD'S LOVE

Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers, today we really celebrate! We celebrate the greatest feast of the year. We celebrate the fact that all of us come to the Lord in our sin, in our brokenness, and the risen Lord saves us and heals us completely.

As you can see in the backdrop, this beautiful cross has got the marks of pain and suffering, but those marks have been illumined by the gift of the resurrection. This is what happens to us as well: the wounds and the pain of our old brokenness and sin are healed because Jesus is our saviour, and we celebrate the culmination of this saving act in his resurrection.

And so, for each one of us and for all of us, for you and for me, let this celebration of the Eucharist be truly an experience of resurrection – rising to a new and beautiful life.

At this Eucharist, we will not have the usual penitential act, but there will be a penitential prayer, followed by the sprinkling of water that reminds us of our own baptism – our first initiation into the faith and into the risen life of Jesus. This water was blessed last night at the Easter Vigil service.

Let us be aware of our brokenness, our sin, and let this water cleanse us as we receive its drops on our bodies.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, a few years ago, I was interacting with a young man who had a very serious addiction in his life. I will not mention the addiction, but it is sufficient to say that it held him in bondage, in captivity, in enslavement. I'm sure that at some point, the Lord entered into this man's life. A few days ago, I received an email from this man, and he shared with me a little story, which I want to share with you. At the end of the story, he writes, 'Happy Easter'.

This story is about a ewe, a female sheep. It is observed among sheep that there is a certain mannerism, a certain behaviour, and this is what is explained in the story. Every once in a while, a ewe will give birth to a lamb and reject it. A ewe can give birth to two or three lambs at a time, but sometimes, she rejects one of them. There are many reasons why the ewe would reject a lamb that she has given birth to – it is often the smallest and weakest lamb that is born. If this lamb is brought back to the ewe, the mother may even kick this poor animal away. Once the lamb is rejected, the ewe will never change her mind about it.

These rejected lambs will hang their heads so low that it looks like their necks are broken. In fact, their spirits are broken. These lambs are called 'bummer lambs', and unless the shepherd intervenes to save such a lamb that was rejected, this lamb will die of rejection – rejected and alone.

So, do you know what the shepherd does? He picks up that rejected lamb, takes it into his own home, hand-feeds it and keeps it warm near the fireplace. He wraps it in his own blanket and cares for it. He holds the lamb close to his chest, so that it can hear his heartbeat.

When the lamb begins to grow and becomes a little stronger, the shepherd takes this lamb and leaves it once again with the rest of the flock. And then, whenever the shepherd calls out to the flock, do you know which one comes running first? The rejected lamb. It runs first to the shepherd because it has had a one-on-one relationship with him. This lamb knows clearly the voice of the shepherd.

The reflection that was part of this story is that all of us could be that rejected lamb. None of us seated in this church this morning can say that our lives are without any wounds. None of us can say that we don't need the presence, the love, the heartbeat, the warmth of the Shepherd. The shepherd does not love the rejected lamb more than the other sheep, but that lamb knows that it was loved by the shepherd, and that is sufficient.

Sometimes, we want to compare ourselves – does God love me more than others? We may never know the answer that question, but we can always be assured that the shepherd, who is the Good Shepherd, the risen Lord, is the one who has seen our rejection, our brokenness, our sinfulness, and has held us close to him to heal us and to bring us new life.

This morning, as we celebrate the resurrection, we celebrate the fact that each one of us has come to God in our rejection, in our brokenness, in our woundedness, and the risen Lord has accepted us. That is definitive. We cannot do anything to escape his love. We cannot do anything in the world, no matter how evil, how wrong, to merit a rejection from the Shepherd who is risen from the dead. The resurrection is God's final and definitive act of salvation to the world. We are all bummer lambs, rejected, but saved by the risen Lord. Alleluia!

The Lord's Prayer

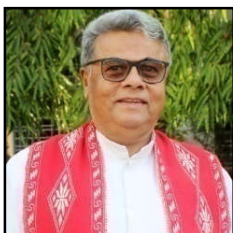
God our Father loves the world – he loves each one of us so much that he sent his only beloved Son to this earth to save us from our sin and to bring us the joy of the resurrection, the joy of being saved in the most difficult and challenging circumstances. Jesus is risen! We thank the Father. Our Father...

Dismissal

I would like to add to the official Easter greetings that were expressed. I wish you all the joy of the risen Lord. Let 'alleluia' be our constant song – the song of praise to God for the joy, the hope, he brings into our lives in the most challenging situations.

I'd like to suggest to you that today, as we celebrate Easter, you reach out to somebody who is feeling rejected – maybe your own family member, a neighbour, a person in the community, or someone on the street. Our parish Family Cell has decided to reach out, after the next Mass, to certain families living on the roadside and to share with them the joy of Easter. I'd like to suggest that you also reach out to someone who is alienated, rejected, lonely or poor. You will experience a deep joy.

May the joy of the risen Lord be with you.



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