

Reflection – Sister Pat Siemen – Easter Vigil 2017
April 15, 2017 – Holy Rosary Chapel

Easter Vigil 2017 Reflection, Holy Rosary Chapel *By Sister Pat Siemen, OP, Prioress*

First, before you go setting off for Galilee to join the Risen One, as the Gospel reading tells us, I want to welcome you, on behalf of our Council members – Mary Margaret, Fran, Patty, and Elise – to this evening's Easter Vigil celebration. We are always so pleased to have friends and family members and so many of our Sisters who come home to celebrate Holy Week with us for this Holy Saturday liturgy. This is a night that is filled with many sacred symbols: darkness, light, fire, water, incense, and sounds of Alleluia ringing in our ears. It is one of the richest, most symbolic liturgies of the Church's year – and also the longest! But please do stay to join us for conversation and hors d'oeuvres in the Adrian Room after the liturgy is concluded.

And so, a blessed and joy-filled Easter to all! We rejoice in this momentous and central experience of our Christian faith: that after 13 billion years of God's presence working throughout an evolutionary process of creation that is seen as "good," Jesus is risen and joins the Cosmic Christ energy of creation. How can we keep from singing? O death, where is your sting?

Given the many (and long) readings tonight, I want to focus on Matthew's Gospel. It is the story of women who faithfully stayed with Jesus at the foot of the cross, feeling distressed and powerless by his crucifixion. Undoubtedly sleepless, they get up early in the morning and come back to where he is buried. We can only imagine their conversation: feeling heartsick, fearful, and full of grief. And then an "earthquake" erupts that shakes the land and tomb around them. Imagine their terror, and that of the guards, when they see someone dressed in white, sitting on the rock near the tomb, who says to them, "Do not be afraid. Jesus who was crucified is no longer here. Come, see where he was laid.... And then go to his other disciples and tell them that 'he is raised from the dead.' He goes before you into Galilee. You will see him there."

Now this is truly incredible. Jesus is not in the tomb. As the women leave the tomb they are feeling "both fearful and overjoyed." One can imagine their confusion as they start back. Dare they believe the messenger at the tomb? And then, as they head back to the disciples, Jesus comes to meet them.

Just imagine, have you ever been fearful, and yet hopeful, that God would somehow "show up" in your life when you were confused and needing support and comfort? So here is the newly risen Jesus on the path in front of them. His first act is seeking out these women who were his friends; the women who always supported and loved him; the women who stayed with him during his crucifixion. He gazed on them from the cross and knew they loved him to the end. When he greets them on the path they recognize him and fall at his feet, embracing him. Can you feel their joy and utter amazement? And then Jesus says to them, "Do not be afraid."

How often we hear that phrase. It seems that in order to recognize and experience God, we must first let go of our fear. Jesus then tells them to "go tell the others. Tell them what you see and know. 'We have seen Jesus. He says to go to Galilee and you will see him too. He will meet you there.'" Clearly the Risen One goes ahead of us, leading the way into an unknown and evolving future.

And so these women are the first ones to encounter the Risen Jesus. They are the first preachers of the Good News - the Good News of emergent life after death; the Good News that suffering and death does not have the last Word.

Encounter and engagement is at the heart of knowing God. It is through encounter with those who suffer, engagement with those we love and those we find difficult to love, that we know God. This is how we get to know the inclusive, compassionate heart of God. Bruno Cadore, OP, Master of the Dominican Order, wrote recently, "Encounter is the first way of preaching." The women at the tomb are overjoyed by their surprise encounter with the Risen Jesus. They are the first preachers of the Good News. They are the ones who now tell us *to not be afraid*. They tell us to move on towards Galilee, for indeed, the Holy One always goes before us.

And so we joyfully journey toward the Galilees of our day. We travel this road together, knowing that as we make this journey, we are accompanied by the Risen One who overcomes violence with love, and teaches us not to be afraid. As we encounter the Light of the Risen Jesus, may the Christ-fire burn in our hearts. As Teilhard de Chardin reminds us, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, (hu)mans will have discovered fire."

Let us share this fire with others as we get on with the journey!