



Things to Ponder

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I'll Be Back! (Based on John 20:1-9)

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

In spite of all of Jesus' reassurance to the disciples that three days after His death, He would rise again, today's Gospel from St. John reveals their disbelief that, indeed, He had risen. Mary Magdalene, upon seeing the empty tomb, concludes that His body had been stolen. Peter looks at the empty tomb and is filled with confusion. Not until later that afternoon when Jesus entered the room where the disciples had gathered, with the doors firmly locked for fear of the Jews, do His disciples realize what had happened.

John, on the other hand, as the Gospel states, saw and believed. What caused him to believe so immediately? Perhaps he saw and understood the significance of the seemingly minor detail that the cloth that had covered Jesus face was rolled up and laid apart from the other burial wrappings.

In Jesus' time, when guests had gathered for a meal, they would carefully fold their used napkin as a sign that they were finished. But if a guest had to leave for a moment, he would roll the napkin loosely, and leave it at his place as a sign that he was not finished, but would return quickly. The rolled up face cloth, similar to a napkin, was Jesus' sign to the disciples: "I'll be back."

Most people and most religions long for eternal life in some form. It is natural for us to want to live forever, natural to want the good things in life to last, natural to view death as the greatest loss. But that hope was just an impossible dream until Jesus actually did it. Now, since rising from the death has happened for the first time, it can happen to everyone.

At times we experience the disbelief that because Christ has risen, we too will rise again. If we have no experience of rising from the dead in some form, how can we believe in something we know absolutely nothing about? If we have found no joy in sadness or hope in despair, how can we possibly find life in death? If we have not bounced back from failure, if we have not recuperated from suffering, then how can we reasonably expect to rise from our own death? We cannot really believe in Christ's resurrection until we believe firmly in our own.

We innately yearn for eternal life, but that is no more than a wish until it has been verified by Christ. But His resurrection is just raw data until it is processed through our own experience. A Christian is not one who merely believes in the resurrection of Christ; a Christian is not one who merely believes in their own resurrection after death. A Christian is

one who believes that death and resurrection are a way of life - that joy really does bloom in the soil of sadness, that hope really does rise from the ashes of despair, that a spirit of life really does spring from the dust of deadly things. A Christian is one who believes that daily dying and rising are all a part of the final event.

We could think of resurrection as the genetic code written into all of creation. The sun sets in the evening, but rises anew in the morning. Every spring, what was, from all appearances, blooms back into life. Every night we experience a kind of dying when we fall asleep, but we come back to life with the rising of the sun. An ugly and painful wound heals and disappears. The painful striving to achieve an important goal ends in the joy of accomplishment. The hurt we experience from being misunderstood or rashly judged, as happened to Jesus, can strengthen and forge us.

The resurrection is a part of everyday life, especially as we strive to die to whatever distances us from Christ so that we can live more fully our discipleship in Christ.

During the coming Easter Season may we understand and live more intensely the immensity of resurrection, so that when we draw our last breath in this juggling act we call life, we can say, with Jesus, "I'll be back!"

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St. Andrew Apostle Catholic Church, Silver Spring, MD