

April 16 (Easter)

Acts 10:34-43

Col. 3:1-4

Jn. 20:1-18

Let us pray: Ever-loving God, as Mary Magdalene and John embraced hope to find Jesus risen from death, help us participate in that tremendous love of yours as you make all things new, so that we can walk in newness of life in unity with Christ in resurrection after dying with him. Amen.

As we greet each other with 'Happy Easter', I want to cite the words of our Primate Fred Hiltz in saying: 'Easter is, at its heart, a celebration of the life that just and generous love makes possible. That love finds expression in the death of Jesus, and then in the incredible good news, 'He is alive!' In that Easter moment, we ourselves are invited to join the work that just and generous love is doing to 'make all things new'.'

Yes, we can surely appreciate from our Gospel Reading today on the episode of Jesus' resurrection: what incredible good news it was when Mary Magdalene in her utter despair about Jesus' death (thinking that her failure to find Jesus' body was because someone had stolen the body), heard the risen Christ call her by name. No wonder her immediate response after talking to Jesus was to go to announce to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!' Likewise when John figured out from the empty tomb that Jesus was no longer dead but is alive, he returned home with all the peace in his mind, as he held onto the belief on Jesus' resurrection.

Resurrection and new life are indeed exciting. Most of the time we are excited about births and new lives, not to mention re-births and new lives. We admire those adorable new babies, and we imagine for them lives filled with wonder and opportunities lying ahead of them. Yet, we also know well that if everything is gorgeously smooth-sail, resurrection and re-birth won't be half-exciting. This is not even to mention those babies born in refugee camps, or in places haunted by famine (e.g. in South Sudan, Somalia or Kenya), or in war-torn countries, just to name a few typical examples. I often think about these young souls when I hear a sharp contrast from joyous laughter of the pre-school kids playing outside my office or downstairs in the hall. And, in terms of Easter, even if most of these kids are not from families of faith, at least Easter gives them chances of doing egg-hunting. What does Easter offer to those numerous kids struggling for survival in the world?

Well, whilst those kids struggling may not yet be aware of it, Easter has much hope to offer in that regard. After all, these are the most vulnerable souls who desperately need hope of resurrection and re-birth, like Jesus' disciples (including

Mary Magdalene) who had totally lost hope when Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday. Could they imagine that there can be hope after having experienced tragedy again and again? How about other tragedies happening in our world today, such as terrorists' attacks happening anywhere any time, not just in North America and western Europe (like outside the House of Parliament in London), but also on a subway train at St. Petersburg in Russia? Is there any hope for the victims and their loved ones in so many different incidents of terrorists' attacks?

The good news of Easter, as how St. Peter explained in today's First Reading, is: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. . . . you know how God anointed Jesus . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power, how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil . . . they put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear . . . to us. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

In other words, Peter emphasized that God shows no partiality, for the risen Christ materialized God's will of granting all humanity new life 'without distinctions'. That's the Easter good news – viz., 'that everyone who believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins through his name'. That is our new life in Christ. That is the much needed hope for everybody, especially those wrestling with hopelessness under all sorts of different contexts.

About two weeks ago I inadvertently had my fingers cut by a hedge-trimmer – I thought it had stopped as I stopped pressing the button for power supply, but it turned out that the trimmer was merely slowing down without coming to a final halt immediately. When I held onto my bleeding felt-hand fingers with my right hand and held them up high in tight grips as my desperate attempt to stop the profuse bleeding, all that I knew was fear and prayer. I knew well that whatever damage had been done were there already, and I wasn't even able to tell the extent of injury as blood kept dripping down all over my jacket and onto the ground. I didn't even quite feel the pain until later. I suspect I was overwhelmed by the accident. I could only pray in hope, praying for restoration of wellness to my fingers. Trust me, I really don't want to lose my fingers. This stark contrast between fear and hope is quite revealing, and it came back to me as I read the

Second Reading today from the author of the Letters to the Colossians reminding us that ‘if we have been raised with Christ (by virtue by Easter), we are to set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for we have died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God . . .’. To me at that moment of profuse bleeding as a result of the accident, whilst I was not seeking to take a spiritual flight away from the reality of the accident and the damage it might have brought upon me, I was hanging onto the hope of my hidden life in Christ (who is my Savior and healer). That hidden life is a journey of pilgrimage and whatever that journey would take me to embrace is not something I can control. I know well that whatever happens I’ll still move on in pilgrimage, but my prayer is that I can walk on, not by coping but with full-blown new life. This is not too far from how that Colossian epistle passage was concluded with the words: ‘when Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.’ Thanks be to God for answering my prayer - I only got six stitches being sutured onto one finger while two other fingers got minor cuts, and they have all regained new life and are in full function now.

As we think about it, that amazing hope brought to all through Easter is easily comprehensible, as we cast our minds towards the fact that Easter boils down to God’s love to all. How better can God shower love upon all mortals, than to give them opportunity of re-birth and new life after one gets wearied and worn out upon being detached from God as our source of life and being? Isn’t that like how I hoped and prayed that my fingers could be healed so that the nerve endings could be attached back to the nerves running along the entire finger?

Recently we received an Easter card from one long-term parishioner of ours writing from Ontario, asking how we survived the snow this past winter. She knew well that we would find that extended extreme weather tough. We wrote back to tell her that cherry blossoms had finally started to bloom, and she would be relieved to hear that we could see signs of new life manifested by cherry blossoms.

Can we too, be like cherry blossoms, become signs of God’s new life for us and for the world, so as to bring God’s hope for all mortals? Whilst we are not living in war-torn countries or places filled with famine or violence, we have loved ones, friends, and neighbors around us who like us, are mortals and so like us, need hope from God’s love for us. Some of them can be like Mary Magdalene or John who has got such hope already. Yet some of them can be like Peter, couldn’t figure out that Jesus had risen and saw only the empty tome. Even more of them can be like

me encountering accidents or other unanticipated challenges in life. Are we ever mindful of letting our new life hidden in Christ to help them see the possibility of setting minds not on mishaps or challenges per se, but on faith in Christ who gives us new life and hope? As alluded by Peter: 'God shows no partiality' in God's love to everybody in every nation; or even in the children's hymn: 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so; little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong.'

Let's delve deeper in our celebration of Easter, in thanksgiving for God's deep love for us through Christ, and in responding faithfully to live 'our new life hidden with Christ' to its fullness every day.

Let us pray again: Ever-loving God, as Mary Magdalene and John embraced hope to find Jesus risen from death, help us participate in that tremendous love of yours as you make all things new, so that we can walk in newness of life in unity with Christ in resurrection after dying with him. Amen.