3 Easter B

April 15, 2018

St. Patrick

Theme: Happy He “didn’t keep dead”!

That bold, transformed Apostle Peter blurted out to the people: Jesus, **“the author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.”**

Peter got the fever after he *saw* the Risen Jesus. I tell you: If *I* saw Jesus fresh from the tomb, I’d really be bold, on fire!

Several years ago, on Easter Sunday, I was praying quietly in church. A seven-year-older, who was going to receive his First Communion in a couple of weeks, came and knelt down beside me. We were both quiet in prayer, next to one another. At one point I leaned over to him and, calling him by name, asked: “What are you telling Jesus this Easter Sunday?” He paused just a moment and whispered to me: “I’m telling Jesus that I’m happy he didn’t keep dead.”

“I’m happy that he didn’t keep dead.” That seven-year-older got it, didn’t he? The first followers of Jesus, however, didn’t get it. They didn’t get it that the crucified Jesus was—and is—truly alive, and not simply his soul but his body. It was too much of a marvel, too wondrous.

In the Gospel, that first Easter night, Jesus ate the fish they served him. He still had the marks of the wounds.

Oh, I tell you: If I had also been there, you’d have a pastor so persuasive, so filled with the Spirit…I’d be a terrific witness!

But, I haven’t seen the Risen Christ. Nor have you. And it’s been twenty centuries.

These are kite-flying days of early spring. And these windy days bring back to me memories of how, as a boy, our Dad would make homemade kites—using his own glue, and carefully constructing the kite. We would use unbreakable string, and the kite would go so far out into sky. You’d have to hold onto with both hands the stick with the roll of string. Once, when I was about ten and my brother five-years-old, Dad gave off the stick with the roll of string to my brother Lee. With a determined face Lee held onto the roll of string. Our kite went so up in the sky that a cloud covered it, and I shouted out, teasing my brother, “See, Lee, you’ve lost the kite. We can’t see it up there in the sky. It’s gone.” My brother, without looking at me but focused up to the sky, answered us, “Oh, the kite’s there. I can feel the tug on the string.”

Friends: Last Sunday we heard the Risen Jesus reply to Thomas who had fingered his open wounds—**“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”** True, we haven’t seen him, but have you felt the tug deep within you—the tug of the one whom you know as the Risen Jesus? I have, and those tugs sustain me even when there’s nothing but doubts that jab at me.

I know that tug deep within, and I rejoice in that living presence of the Risen Jesus. This past week, among the Easter Scriptures upon which we feast during these fifty days, I came upon a verse of Jesus which each year uplifts me, encourages me. Speaking of himself, Jesus says, **“The one whom God sent…does not ration his gift of the Spirit”** (John 3:34).

Jesus doesn’t ration the gift of his Holy Spirit. He doesn’t give us just a smidgeon of his Spirit compared to the reckless outpouring of his Spirt on those first disciples that first Easter. We hear the boldness of Peter and the other apostles after they were transformed within by the Risen Jesus. Imagine: Promised whenever each of us was baptized, we have just as much of his Spirit showered within and among us as those first disciples received! That’s what we celebrate during the sprinkling rite of the baptismal water throughout the Easter Season.

**“You are witnesses of these things,”** so the Risen Christ charges us. St. Patrick’s: “The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of transformed disciples. The persuasive evidence that Jesus lives now is not an empty grave, but a spirit-filled church. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away” St. Patrick’s. (1)

He tells us now: **“*You* are witnesses of these things.”**

1. Quoted (adapted) from Clarence Jordan, The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons, in Give Us This Day—April 2018 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2018), pg. 165.