

Church of the Crossroads
The Easter Vigil
April 6, 2007
Neal MacPherson

HOMILY

I have often thought that Easter represents the beginning of a new journey in our lives rather than the completion of a journey that began with Ash Wednesday. And the song of Easter that is sung on the new journey that awaits us is the song we have just sung – Alleluia! The most profound Alleluias are sung not when everything is wrapped up but when life is uncertain, nor in the midst of sweetness and light, but in the midst of fear and darkness. As Thomas Merton has said, “Alleluia is the song of the desert.” On that note, the alleluia we just sang is from South Africa. It was composed by a black South African suffering from the indignity and humiliation of apartheid.

Once again, my brothers and sisters, we dare to sing our alleluias. Once again we have begun the journey that takes us towards the new creation God has promised in Jesus, risen from the grave. I have used the word “began” intentionally, for as I will say tomorrow morning, Easter is not as much a completion as it is a beginning. It is not as much as fulfillment as it is a promise. It is not as much an answer as it is an invitation.

Beginning, promise, invitation – all these words speak of the tentative attitude many of us, myself included, have about Easter. In truth, I suspect that most Crossroaders hold the good news of Easter tentatively.

How could it be otherwise? Surely, we are not wiser or more faithful human beings than were the women who first discovered the empty tomb. The story is clear. The women did not discover the empty tomb and immediately say, “Thank you, O God. You have solved all our problems.” They did not exclaim, “How wonderful! Our Lord is risen from the dead and now we have nothing to worry about. Let’s put on a happy face!” No, to the contrary, they are alarmed. The story tells us that they “fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to

anyone, for they were afraid.” In fact, with these words the Gospel of Mark ends. The last word of the Gospel is the word “afraid.”

So it is with us. The Easter story is more of a beginning than a completion, more of a promise than a fulfillment, more of an invitation than an answer. Easter is not about certainty; it is an invitation to faith and to hope. We could ask for nothing more than this. Easter invites us to journey through this world with hope and with faith, and we know that hope has nothing to do with fulfillment – otherwise it would not be hope – nor does faith have to do with sight – otherwise it would not be faith. Yet, without faith and without hope, life holds little meaning or purpose for us, and we are a people lost and alone.

I pray on this night of our Easter Vigil that we might find the grace and courage, in the midst of our wondering and questioning and tentativeness, to once again embark on the journey, in faith and in hope, not alone, but together, knowing as we do that the God who comes to us in the cross of Jesus, and who there suffers with us, is the same God who offers us and our world life in the midst of death. And as we journey together, may the song of the desert, the song of alleluia, be on our lips and in our hearts. For Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia!