

## **Do not doubt what Jesus has told us: we are truly saved through him**

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The past few weeks have been challenging for the Diocese of Fargo as flood water has impacted several of our farms, towns and cities in Eastern North Dakota. We have seen people come together in many different ways to work for the common good and protect our homes and communities. Many of our Catholic parishes and schools helped with flood protection or assisted with those who were evacuated. While some battles were lost and homes were flooded, many were won. Through people of all ages working together, putting in long hours, and showing a spirit of cooperation and good will, one witnessed the living out and making flesh of the second great commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12: 31). I remember helping to prepare sandbags in the Fargodome and how moved I was first by the sheer numbers of people of all ages working together. I was somewhat surprised to see a wheelchair by one of the sand piles. I looked and saw a man with no legs sitting on the floor in front of the wheelchair tying sandbags as they were handed off to him after being filled. My heart was filled with gratitude and joy to witness his dedication.

On Easter Sunday we heard the message of the angel announce to the women, “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you’” (Mk 16: 6-7).

The women go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They desired to help protect Jesus’ dead body from decay. They expected to find his dead body. They worried about who was going to move the stone in front of the tomb for them. They did not expect Jesus to be risen. Even though the women, the disciples and the apostles all listened to Jesus and travelled and lived with him, they still did not fully understand and believe his promises.

The angel first tells the women, “Do not be amazed.” Just as I was amazed at the way the community came together in Fargo and elsewhere to fight a flood, I shouldn’t have been, as it reflects the good will of upper Midwest people that I have come to love since moving to Fargo. It is very simply the way people are in North and South Dakota, and in Minnesota. This goodness is a gift from God, who created us to desire and act for the good, a gift not lost by original sin. And the Gospel fact is that for the women who came to the tomb, the disciples and the apostles, they should have known that Jesus would rise. “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you”(emphasis added).

The angel reminds the women, “as he told you.” We can be very similar to the women, the disciples and the apostles and slow to believe the promises of our God. Yet, Scripture reveals to us how faithful our God is to us. Beginning with Genesis, and throughout the Old Testament, God is faithful. Whether it is after the first sin of Adam and Eve, the sins of the people turning

to false gods and worshipping Baal, even sacrificing their sons and daughters to the false gods, through the rejection of the prophets, God is constantly faithful. God persistently seeks out man and calls man back to him. While humanity is unfaithful and commits every sort of sin, God is faithful in his enduring mercy and love.

St. John reminds us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3: 16-17). God is so faithful that he sends his only Son Jesus into the world. Jesus reveals to us that we have the same “Father”. Jesus healed the sick, forgave sinners, promised eternal life, raised the dead, promised to send the Holy Spirit, was transfigured before three of his apostles, called them friends, identified himself as the Good Shepherd and the bread of life, and told his disciples that he would rise, and even after these great works, the people still arrested, scourged and crucified Jesus. His disciples did not fully understand that he would conquer sin and death. In the Father’s eternal mercy and love he does not even allow the brutal death of his only Son to take away his faithfulness.

We live in a time when people are skeptical and often deny or ignore the true God. Even some who say that they believe still question the very revelation of Jesus Christ . In many ways our hearts are slow to accept all that Jesus has told us in the Gospels. We are so influenced by the habits of the world that we find the habits of God to seem impossible, for his habit is love, mercy and forgiveness. It is too good to be true, many protest. Yet Easter points out to us that the habits of God are not impossible, but more than possible! They are true and have occurred in history in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and these habits have also then filled all of history, to our own day. Unlike the things of the world, the things of God are offered to all peoples from every nation, whether rich or poor, highly educated or little educated, healthy or sick, young or old. God’s love, mercy and forgiveness are pure grace, freely offered by a loving Father who awaits our response.

During this Easter Season may we hear the words of the angel spoken on the first Easter Sunday, “as he told you.” I pray for all of us that those words may penetrate our sluggish hearts. I pray that we may be more receptive to the promises our God has given to us. I pray that we may grow in faith, trust and confidence in Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel. I pray that we may see the fulfillment of his promises in the gift of the Church and most especially in the sacraments given to us by Jesus which continue his saving work. In the sacraments his promises are fulfilled! We encounter him in a personal way and grow in intimacy with our God. I pray that, like the first disciples and apostles who experienced the resurrection, we may live and invite others to the truth and freedom that only Jesus Christ can provide to us. Jesus Christ is truly risen, as he has told us, and as witnessed throughout history by those who believe! May your Easter Season be blessed and your faith in the Risen Lord deepen!