3rd Sunday of Easter

Year B

How many thousands of speakers - religious or otherwise – have taken to a mic over the past two weeks (including this morning) to talk at folks about the total solar eclipse: the mystery of it all, the extraordinary beauty of it, the addictive power of it (if it clouds over this time, just book your ticket now for the next one), yes, and the profundity of the experience – almost like a religious experience, although I myself don’t believe in God, many say. And how fortunate we are at this time in history because we possess the scientific knowledge to predict when such overwhelming natural phenomena are going to occur: we know what’s going to happen, when it’s going to happen, where it will be 100% totality, what it means, what it doesn’t mean. Don’t worry, be happy: we know exactly what’s going to happen.

I remember the days when the six of us – my two older sisters, my “baby” brother, my parents and I – sat at the dinner table and a question or comment reminded my father of something and he uncharacteristically got up from the table without excusing himself, soon to reappear holding some giant book – encyclopedia, dictionary, prose or poetry anthology – and found a related passage - not meant to answer any question but to feed our imaginations and spark more discussion. These days, assuming phones are allowed at the table and assuming everyone is sitting there at the same time, the phones whip out and the answer is immediate, authoritative and beyond question.

Are wonder, curiosity and amazement so terrible? Is not knowing for sure a bad thing? I remember reading – after the fact – that parents shouldn’t necessarily feel the need to tell baby the name of every bird or four-legged because that immediately sets limits: let baby with her sponge-like mind have a conversation with the bird, the squirrel, the chipmunk, the neighbor’s dog, not having any idea of who or what it is! Baby has been doing this for months: both in the womb and then newly born into a world rich with imagination. Knowing for sure gives us knowledge, yes; but it also closes doors: if I know something for a fact, there is no more wonder, there is no seeking, there is no journey.

As we’re walking along the road to Emmaus, a stranger joins us and asks what we’re talking about. What rock have you been hiding under that you don’t know about superman who was going to save the world before he got thrown into jail and strung up like a common crook? I guess we had never heard the expression “don’t put all your eggs into one basket” because we actually believed him. And now no one can find the body, so the whole thing was just a bad joke! Okay, here’s where we’re spending the night; how ‘bout if we share a pitcher before turning in? The bartender brings us a loaf of bread and this guy we just met breaks it into pieces. O my God. My Lord and my God!

Do you have anything to eat? Fish sounds good; I’m starved!

The prophets, going as far back as Moses, everything written about me must be fulfilled: just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, we hear in John’s Gospel. If you believe the prophets, if you believe Moses came down from the mountain, carrying God’s law, believe me: he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

You have been witnesses to all of this: you have been with me this whole time. You have seen all this unfold. Blest are those who have not seen but believe.

Somewhere in each of the Gospels – Mark and Matthew no fewer than three times – Jesus “predicts” the scholars say, I say “refers to the fact that” he will suffer, die and be risen from the dead. In spite of his rather graphic descriptions, Jesus’ words are not heeded, not listened to, not believed. Back then - even without the extraordinary truths of CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, NPR – there were too many sources competing to be the True truth. Who should I believe? Even when Jesus returns to me, reveals himself to me, talks to me, eats with me, laughs with me, dries my tears, I don’t always know whether or not to believe.

As I’m praying and typing today’s message, I stop to think, leaning my elbows on the table. I notice a flower in the vase trembling, and realize it is my heart beating.

One thing I know for sure: I will never fully understand. The lenses through which I look, the world’s messages which circle all around me, seeming at times to choke the life out of me, are flawed and present me with distortions of the Truth. Here’s the good news, though, Baptism: that even in my state of confusion, I know that my Redeemer lives; I know that I am a child of God, that I owe my very existence to God; that I will strive to do good in the world; that my mind will always be inquiring and full of curiosity; that I am able to rejoice in the Lord always, to give thanks for everything, whether or not I understand what it means or when it’s going to happen. And new…. everyday…. with the hymnist I respond to God that I am lost in wonder, love and praise.