

Easter Vigil and Day, April 15-16, 2017

One of Pope Saint John Paul II's frequent and favorite words of encouragement was: "do not be afraid, do not be afraid to live your faith in Jesus Christ with deep commitment and enthusiasm, and do not be afraid to give strong witness to your faith so that others will be attracted to it."

His encouraging words echo the words we hear in today's Gospel. These words in St. Matthew's Gospel are spoken by the angel of the Lord at Jesus' tomb. They were spoken to the two Mary's, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, two disciples of Jesus who had come at sunrise, out of love for him, to see and be close to where his dead body lay.

What these two women encountered was quite unexpected. There was an earthquake and an angel appeared like lightning, who was clothed in brilliant white garments. Even though the guards were terror stricken, the women were calmed by the angel's message: "do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised from the dead."

The angel then instructed the women to go quickly to share this good news with the other disciples and the apostles. Off they went on their mission. This is why these women, especially Mary Magdalene, are often called the apostles to the apostles.

On their way, fearful yet overjoyed, Jesus met and greeted them, with the same encouraging words: "do not be afraid!" He also told them to tell his brothers (the apostles and disciples) of their meeting him and that he would see them in Galilee.

Modern day skeptics, like the Jesus Seminar, try to debunk and discredit Jesus' bodily resurrection and the testimony of the first witnesses of his appearances, claiming that this belief was developed and promoted much later.

The earliest New Testament writings, however, insist that Jesus, after being crucified, rose from the dead. Peter reports: “they put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” (*Acts 10:40*)

Saint Paul, in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, writes: “if Christ is not raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too.” (*1 Corinthians 15:14*)

My friends, the message of the angel and that of Jesus are still relevant. Repeating the exhortation of Pope Saint John Paul II, may I urge you: do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to believe that Jesus is risen and alive. His life and teachings have guided people for over two millennia. As he taught, “I have come that you might have life and life in abundance.”

Do not be afraid to commit or recommit your life to him as a faithful and committed disciple. Do not be afraid to live honestly, chastely, and charitably even in a world which devalues these ideals. Do not be afraid to acknowledge your sins and faults to him for he is merciful and forgiving.

Do not be afraid to share your faith in the risen Jesus with one another and with others by your words, example, and life-style.

We are overjoyed tonight as well to celebrate Jesus’ victory and to share our faith by welcoming our catechumen elect, Jeffrey John Carhart and our candidate Bailey Joseph Pappas, and celebrating the Easter sacraments for and with them.