

## Christ Was Crazy -- Easter Vigil B

What are we doing here on a Saturday evening? I thought Easter was tomorrow! The great excitement of our Easter Vigil begs this very question. What day is it? Are we standing watch outside a tomb because we know what will happen, or are we here to marvel at an empty sepulcher where a very dead body was, only a day or so ago? In Bulgarian, the Easter greeting is: Christos Voskhrese – Christ is risen! To which one responds: Voeesteeno Vozkhrese! Is risen indeed. But to this all-American wiseacre, it sounds like Christ was crazy – crazy to try transforming the human condition by letting himself die.

This is the threshold of the wonder of Christian faith. We stand on the liminal doorstep of death and life because it is only here that we can fully engage Creation. In the words of St. Francis' prayer, we are channels of God's peace when we acknowledge that it is by self-forgetting that we find, it is by forgiving that we are forgiven, and it is by dying that we awaken to eternal life.

Why else would reasonably sane people take themselves and their babies and pretend to drown them for a moment in baptism, if not to acknowledge that this moment in time is the one that defines time for Christian people. The moment between death and life when we are not just reminded, but transformed from

individual mortal creatures into the eternal body of Christ.

How hard we try to put this transformation from us! In so many ways, we resist. When I was little, my grandmother, a truly devout and spiritually wonderful Christian, nevertheless would say “let’s put away all the badness” whenever we were upset. Or take the idea of transformation. For the Hebrews and the Greeks, the words teshuva and metanoia respectively mean to turn around completely. But we have softened transformation to mean creative adaptation and so as to remain in control of the situation. Not a death, but a little time-out, huddle up, re-think instead.

Tonight’s activity, by contrast is starker, stronger and more thoroughly overwhelming. We are not just rethinking; we are not putting away the badness. We are being transformed from mortal creatures into spiritual beings, from the dead into the living. From now on we are with Christ, whatever deaths we experience. Sure we hope they’re not so horrific, but whatever deaths we experience – our own and those of our loved ones – they’re ours. Your biggest problem is your biggest problem. Jesus knew he was going to die, and so do we. But because of tonight, the tomb both full and empty, our hearts both heavy and light, we know that death is not the final word.

A pastor in Florida tells the story of his experience as a trainee making hospital rounds with his slightly unorthodox and provocative chaplain supervisor. They stood at the bedside of a prominent citizen who was recovering from a drug overdose and facing DUI charges. The patient lamented, "I've lost everything, my job, my reputation, my livelihood, all of it. This is the end." "Interesting," said the chaplain, "to me it seems like the beginning." "What? How? What do you mean?" "Well you say you've lost everything." "Yes, all that mattered to me in the world." "Well, then, God has you all to himself. Just think what God can do with you now!"

Because of this full and empty tomb, we are conscious of the continuing presence of Christ through life and beyond death in our community, our families, in our dedication to service, our compassionate devotion to the poor and downtrodden, in our quiet times of prayer and dreaming. We know that Jesus Christ will be with us, not only in the great vault of heaven where we will reside with God's holy angels, but also at our picnics on the beach and our bedsides. We can cease to fear death. We may hate it, but we shall no longer fear it. We can, as the fella says, just go ahead and love one another to the best of our ability. We can, we must and so we do.

And of course we have to talk about it. The ancient historian Josephus, writing about the women at the tomb said, "From women, let not evidence be accepted,

because of the levity and temerity of their sex.” Uh huh. Frivolity and recklessness? Well, perhaps it takes some of each to tell such a true tale of life and death and life again as this one. Call them good humored and courageous instead, Josephus. Perhaps we must each be a little off the beaten path in order to get an angle where we can look with awe on this empty tomb, where we can accept and rejoice that the living will not be found among the dead, and then go bear witness to that wonder in all we do, even though they may call us crazy. Sure, Christos vozkhrese, and so must we all be, vozkhrese – risen – indeed risen -- vooe’steeno voskhrese!