

Homily for Easter 2008, - March 23, 2008

Easter Vigil Lections - Matthew 28:1-10

This gospel passage
is as sweet as anything you'll find in your Easter basket.
Unfortunately, we often approach the scriptures
with a grim seriousness that easily blinds us
to the delicious beauty in God's word.
Like the scene in the gospel just proclaimed!

Did you miss the super-hero
who descended from the heavens, in an earthquake?
He came in the form of lightning - and was dressed in human clothing!
I wonder:
what did well-dressed lightning wear in first century Jerusalem?
We know the color was bright white - but what about the style?
Would you agree
that lightning probably prefers clothes with a looser fit?
And imagine how quickly lightning goes through new clothes!

So we have an angel who looks like lightning, dressed to the 9's,
who (grunt) rolls - back - the - stone - sealing - the tomb...
and sits on it!

The word of God made flesh, the Savior of the world,
the Lord and Redeemer of us all is risen from the dead –
and Lightning-Angel takes a breather from stone-rolling -
and sits down.

This is some cool angel – hot as lightning – but still cool!

And the Lightning-Angel speaks to the two women:
Take it easy... Chill! Don't be afraid.

But they are afraid!

The guards are frozen in their fear
and the two women are frightened...
and grieving,
and disappointed, depressed, defeated,
confused, overwhelmed, hopeless,
and bereft of their friend, the Teacher, the Master – Jesus.

*So the angel goes easy on them... One step at a time...
I know why you're here.
You came to see the body of Jesus,
the one who was crucified.*

*I know how you feel - but he's not here:
he's been raised from the dead...
Remember? he told you this would happen – and he meant it.
I know it's hard to believe but come here and look –
that's why I rolled the stone away -
see, the tomb is empty.
He's no longer among the dead – he lives –
and he has gone ahead of you to Galilee.
Now, you go and tell the men...*

And still afraid, but joyful, too,
they ran from the tomb
but before they got back to tell the others,
Jesus met them on their way and said,
"Don't be afraid..."

If the message of Easter is "Don't be afraid..."
then we need to ask ourselves,
"What do we fear?" this Easter 2008?

What are the fears, the disappointments, the confusion,
the grief, the hopelessness, the losses in our lives
in need an earthquake and Lightning-Angel
to help us confront our difficulties
and begin to believe, again,
that no matter how great the pain, even the pain of death,
Jesus, our friend,
our Teacher and Master is with us through it all
and that he knows the way out – not just the way to Galilee –
but the way out of death to life.

He knows that road because he has traveled it himself.

And he's not just sitting at the end of the road,
waiting for us to get there.
Rather, he meets us, as he met the two women,
- along the way -
because he wants to walk with us and show us the way – to life.

Jesus didn't spend long in the tomb himself
and he doesn't want us to hang around there, either.

He wants to bring us from fear to confidence,
from hopelessness to trust,
from grief to joy,
from confusion to understanding,
from depression to serenity,

from loss to fulfillment -
and from defeat to victory.

The message of the angel
is the message of Easter:
"Don't be afraid," says the Lord,
"I have walked this road already
and I walk it with you now
and I go before you...
Don't be afraid."

Fr. Fleming