

## Easter Sunday

April 16, 2006

Acts 10:34, 37-43

Psalm 18: 1-2,16-17, 22-23

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-9

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The 1980 United States Olympic Hockey Team is credited with having achieved one of the greatest upsets in recent sports history. Many of us are old enough to remember, and still more of us have heard, about how a small, unassuming group of amateurs took on a mighty Russian power loaded with professional heavy weights, and defeated them on the way to winning a gold medal.

The members of the team gathered last year to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of this great victory, and the starting goalie was reflecting on the experience, stating the following: "We didn't win because we were the most talented. We didn't win because we were the strongest or the most powerful... We won because WE LOVED EACH OTHER. We gave all that we had. Each one poured out all of himself for the other, and together we achieved what we could never have achieved on our own."

Today, we celebrate the greatest victory of all time. Jesus Christ's victory over death itself... The power of love trumps hate... The force of good triumphs over evil. Even Jesus' closest friends did not see this upset in the making, and surely no one short of Jesus Himself would have predicted it. We hear in the Gospel that His friends had come to His tomb "in the dark," empty, and assured of defeat. They had witnessed His death with their own eyes. They hardly came to celebrate a victory, as much as to anoint and attend to the corpse of a friend, whom they had loved and, as it turns out, one who had loved them more than they ever could ever have imagined. And they were about to discover the power of such a love.

They approached the tomb and find the stone rolled away. They entered the tomb and do not find the body of the Lord Jesus, and still victory does not immediately dawn on them. Why would it? The power of the world operates a certain way. We live and we die. Death is inevitable. Death takes friends, family and hundreds of thousands around the globe every day. It is not always fair, and with it takes the hopes and dreams of many. The world tells us death always wins in the end. Yet, somehow there is still that little space inside us, beyond the teachings of the world, that says to us, we are created for something more.

That little space was found inside the empty tomb...that little open space where death used to be was indeed found, and it rekindled those ashes and embers of faith, hope and love that lie with in all of us...That little space sparked a slow burning fire of belief that says: The tomb was empty because even death could not hold Him. Even death could not keep Him down.

This greatest of victories is proclaimed in John's gospel from the very beginning. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only son...so that all those who believe in Him might not perish but find everlasting life..." And for the BELIEVERS that we are, this empty tomb is all about the power of God to overcome death.

None of us can go through life undefeated. We are flesh and blood. There will be losses. We lose everyday. We lose jobs, we lose money, we lose our health... our youth and our friends. Ultimately, we lose our earthly lives. Each one of us from time to time is sure to experience the inevitability of feeling like we just can't win... We are defeated. There is temptation to give in to despair or become bitter and cynical.

But then there is the power of love. God so loved each one of us that he became flesh and blood, and then poured it out willingly for all of us, UNDERDOGS, to break the power of sin, despair and death forever. Now that's a major upset.

Saint Paul proclaims with firm faith and conviction: "Where death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Death has been swallowed in victory."

Maybe even now you are in the midst of a loss and experiencing real emptiness in your life. Well, take a good look inside that emptiness and see in that space, a space where Jesus can make something totally new and unexpected out of it. See in that space, a place where Jesus restores hope. See in that space, a space where Jesus can place his love and His grace, and call us to reach out beyond ourselves to follow him and lead others to victory.

Karl Rahner eloquently remarked: "What we feel in emptiness is not the death of God, but rather the space within which God can be born...emptiness is only a disguise for an intimacy of God's, that God's silence, the eerie stillness is filled by the word without words...and His silence is telling us that He is here. "

Jesus Christ is risen! And He is right here in this community, right now! He speaks to us now in the Eucharist saying: This is my body and blood given up for you...it is shed for you and for all so that sins will be forgiven..."

Be filled with His Spirit and know that you will live forever.

God is saying: "You are mine, and marked as Christ's... filled with my grace.

And my presence is real, and will never leave you..."

My presence is the most powerful thing you will ever experience in your entire life.

My presence will always remind you that you are forgiven..."

You Win! Not because of anything you did or did not do. You Win! Not because you are the strongest, smartest, most talented, or even the most charitable person. You win because I LOVED YOU."

Alleluia.