The Lord has risen from the dead, as he said; let us all exult and rejoice, for he reigns for all eternity, alleluia. (Entrance Antiphon)

Fear and joy … or … fear and deceit. Depending on your point of view, the resurrection of Jesus is either Good News or bad news.

Let’s start with the Good News of fear and joy. The joy of Easter Sunday echoes throughout the octave of Easter, the 8 days between Easter Sunday and Divine Mercy Sunday. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of James and Joseph) are the first to the tomb in the Gospel of Matthew. The initial worry over an empty tomb gives way to understanding when the angel explains that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The 2 Marys are now fearful in a positive way. They share a wonder an awe of Jesus who has power over death. They share love and understanding. They run to announce the Good News.

Good Friday’s crucifixion was horrifying and traumatic. But that all fades away like the morning fog when the sun comes out. They experience the thrill of victory over death. Christ is risen. Alleluia, Alleluia. Their joy will only grow greater when they encounter the risen Jesus firsthand.

The resurrection of Jesus is bad news for those who rejected Jesus and his message of love. Imagine you had a hand in the state execution of Jesus, a perfectly innocent man. At the time, even though you were motivated by hate and jealousy, you thought you were solving a problem by putting an enemy to death. Now the impossible has happened. The tomb is empty, and it didn’t happen by natural means. This is a time for fear, fear of being found out as frauds, fear of the power of one who can defy death, fear of the unknown. Blinded by their own sin, the chief priests and the elders rationalize that if they control the fake news, then people will still let them hold on to power believing their lies. Like Adam and Eve grabbing for fig leaves, they believe they can hide from the truth if they just cover their tracks and blame the disappearance on the disciples. Fear and deceit are impotent against the Truth of the Resurrection.

“Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God” (1 Pt 3:18). For those who cling to bad news, there is another way. Truth has the power to heal. Let’s take a closer look at the 1st Reading from the Acts of the Apostles which is set on the opposite end of the Easter Season, 50 days out on the Feast of Pentecost.

As a firsthand witness to the resurrection of Jesus, Peter has experienced wonder an awe. He is overjoyed to have multiple encounters with the risen Christ. In forgiveness, Peter experiences the power of the resurrection to heal his 3-fold denial on Good Friday. And like the prodigal son who returned to his father, Jesus has placed a mantle in Peter’s shoulders and the keys to the Kingdom in his hands. Peter loves God with all of his heart and soul and will help build the church as the prime shepherd. Plus with Pentecost, Peter and the other Apostles receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. Peter is indeed a blessed man. Set on fire by the Spirit, Peter uses the truth to set others free (Jn 8:32).

Peter pulls no punches in speaking to the crowds on Pentecost, some no doubt who would have yelled “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (Luke 23:21) on Good Friday. Peter challenges them: “This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him.”

The truth can sting, but it can also help the blind to see. When they heard Peter, the crowds were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized!” (Acts 2:37-38) Jesus died to set us free, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven if we ask for God’s help. Indeed, fear and deceit can be transformed into awe, wonder and joy.

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