

*Sermon for Easter Vigil
by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson
Holy Nativity, Plano
7 April, 2007*

It is a terrifying thing to place your very self in the hands of God. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary know that. They have given their hearts to Jesus, and they have had their hearts broken on the cross. Their Lord is dead. And all that is left for them is to mourn him.

But these women are not even allowed to mourn in peace. Into their respectable grief breaks an earthquake and an angel. St. Matthew says that “his appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow.” The guards are so afraid of him that they pass out. And what does he say to the two women who have given themselves to Jesus? “Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.”

Do not be afraid. For, as St. Paul says, “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Those who have died with him and handed their selves over to God are no longer enslaved to the sin that was in them. They are resurrected to real life in Christ. They experience the fulfillment of the promise to Ezekiel: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.”

From Zephaniah we get a picture of God's response to those who persevere, his response to those who take up their crosses and die with him. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." God exults over us when we act in obedience. When God sees us trying to give ourselves to him, he is saying, "Yes!!!! Don't be afraid. Keep going!"

The angel gives our two women a task. He tells them to witness to the fact of Jesus' Resurrection: "Come see the place where he lay." Then he commands them to go tell the good news: "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead." And it is in obedience to this command that they see Jesus. St. Matthew tells us that "they departed quickly..., and ran to tell the disciples." And then Jesus himself greets them. And they are able to touch him and worship him.

And then Jesus himself repeats the words of the angel: "Do not be afraid; go and tell..."

It is a terrifying thing to place your very self in the hands of God. But to give ourselves to Jesus is the only freedom. If we have been united with him in death, we are united with him in resurrection. And that is real life.

Do not be afraid. Give yourself to Jesus. And then share the true life that you have in him.