

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008

Cecil B. DeMille tells the story of a young boy who was spending the afternoon fishing with his grandfather. For a while they drifted aimlessly in a rowboat on a lake, talking and fishing, and having a great time. But before long, the boy became restless, and leaned over the side of the boat to look into the water. Just beneath the surface, water beetles were flitting around as if playing.

He noticed one of the water beetles crawling up on the oar. When it was well out of the water, it attached its talons to the wooden oar and died. The boy pointed this out to his grandfather; then they went back to fishing. Time passed.

Several hours later, the boy looked down at the dead beetle. What he saw caused him to jump, almost tipping the boat. The beetle had dried up, and its shell started to crack open. Both the astonished boy and his grandfather watched silently at what unfolded before their eyes.

Something began to emerge from the crack; first long feelers, then a head, then moist wings, until finally a beautiful dragonfly fully emerged.

They both stared in awe. The dragonfly began to move its wings, slowly at first. Then it hovered gracefully over the water where the other water beetles were still flitting around. They didn't realize that it was the same beetle they had played with some three hours earlier.

The boy with his finger nudged the dried out shell of the beetle; it was like an empty tomb.

Death, transformed to new life, is all around us--water beetle to dragonfly, caterpillar to butterfly. The apparent death and then transformation of these earthbound creatures into beautiful and ethereal fliers, freed from earth's pull, seem like appropriate images to help us grasp the mystery of the Lord's resurrection.

There are similarities, but also great differences. The fact of Jesus' resurrection is unique in nature and in history. He rose body and soul, not just a return to mortal life, but as a new creation, spiritualized matter freed from all the limitations of matter and destined to live forever.

This is an event to glory in, and it is the heavenly Father's confirmation that Jesus is truly Son of God. It is also God's confirmation of the life Jesus led and of all that he taught us. His resurrection affirms that he is the way, the truth, and the life. This is first and foremost Jesus' day.

But at the heart of Jesus' teaching is the truth that he is the new Adam, the new Abraham, the new Moses, the new David. He is the one toward whom all of them pointed. He is the founder of the new people of God, the Church. He is the establisher of the new covenant.

And so we also celebrate our faith and our hope. For we have been called and chosen to be part of that new people of God. And by being united with the Lord in this life, in following the example he has given us, we know that we shall also share in the glory of his transformation, and will live forever in our God. Our bright clothes today are signs of our hope for transformation and new life.

To live united with Jesus is a tremendous challenge to us, and one we could never live without his help and without the support of our faith community.

For central to his life and teaching is love; first and foremost a love for his heavenly Father, a love that was so strong that his will became one with the will of the father. And that love flows over into a passionate love for all of creation, especially for human beings, created in the image and likeness of God.

In life and in death, Jesus was motivated by love. And so Jesus healed the sick and fed the hungry; he showed his love in forgiveness and reconciliation. And he accepted death on the cross, not because he hated this life or wanted to be free of his body, but to show us just how far God will go to demonstrate his love for us. And Jesus could forgive his executioners and pray that his father would also forgive them.

So today is a day of great joy, but we also must struggle with our fear, for we know what it means to be united with the risen Lord. We know that we will share his glory by embracing the way he has shown us, and that means embracing the whole paschal mystery.

In baptism, we enter that mystery. We are baptized into his death so that we might rise with him to new life. That is the mystery we all embrace in the sacraments of initiation, and we will recall that this morning as we renew our baptismal promises and are sprinkled once again with the waters of baptism. Let us embrace this mystery and commit ourselves to living it fully in our everyday lives.