

Hom 6 Easter C 2019

This is Memorial Day Weekend and we as a nation are remembering the men and women, our Veterans who have made it possible for us to live in this wonderful country. We need to be grateful to our Veterans.

I had a funeral this past Tuesday for Joe Skroback who was the chairperson for our Buildings and Grounds Committee. Without Joe and others like him who work very very hard behind the scenes without any public recognition our parish would simply not exist. There is no way we could keep the doors to this church open given our Sunday collections alone. We depend on our volunteers. They make extraordinary sacrifices for God and for us. We need to be grateful for them too. Even though your names are not in the bulletins every week I want to take this opportunity to remind our volunteers our workers that I am personally grateful for all that you do.

At Joe's funeral mass I told a very old story, a story from when people rode horses instead of cars. It's truly an Easter story and we are celebrating Easter for every one of these forty days following the Resurrection when Jesus appeared to many people. Those 40 days of appearances will end this Thursday when we gather to celebrate Jesus' Ascension into heaven.

In this story, a six year old was left an orphan and his mother's sister sent for him to come live with her. He lived with the aunt, grew up, moved away and married. One day he received news that his aunt was dying. He wrote her a letter. There are his words to his aunt.

It is now thirty-five years since I, a little boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word that you would give me a home and be a mother to me. I've never forgotten the day when I made the long journey of ten miles to your house. I can still recall my disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant, Caesar, a dark man, to fetch me. I well remember my tears and my anxiety as, perched high on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home.

Night fell before we finished the journey and as it grew dark, I became even more afraid. "Do you think she'll go to bed before I get there?" I asked Caesar anxiously.

"Oh, no," said Caesar, "she's sure to stay up for you. When we get out of these woods, you'll see her light shining in the window."

Presently, we did ride out into the clearing and there was your light. I remember that you were waiting at the door, that you put your arms tight around me, that you lifted me, a tired, frightened little boy, down from the horse. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room. You heard me say my prayers. Then you sat with me until I fell asleep.

You probably realize why I am trying to recall this to your memory now. Very soon, God is going to send for you, and take you to a new home. I am trying to tell you that you needn't be afraid of the summons or of the strange journey or of the dark messenger of death. God can be trusted. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you did for me so many years ago.

At the end of the road you'll find love and a welcome waiting. And you'll be safe in God's care. I'm going to watch and pray for you until you're out of sight. And I shall wait for the day when I make the same journey myself and find you waiting at the end of the road to greet me.

Notice the metaphors and symbols: Caesar, the dark figure, is death; the light at the end of the journey is Jesus, the light of the world. The house is the "many rooms" in my Father's house that Jesus promised. The supper is the heavenly banquet. God is the loving aunt. It's a homecoming story. This is gospel, "good news."

One day this will be your story. I hope when the time comes you might find some comfort in it. God doesn't want you to be afraid. Jesus himself told he has gone to prepare a place for us and one day he will come and take us to himself. Trust Jesus. He is standing beside the horse lifting his arms up to take you into his arms. He has a warm fire and a meal waiting. He wants to take us home.

The story is found in William J. Bausch's book *Funeral Homilies*. Twenty-Third Publications. Copyright 2009