

April 8, 2012 – Easter Sunday
Prepared by Sister Rebecca Macugay, MM, Maryknoll, New York

*Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalms 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4, or First Corinthians 5:6-8;
John 20:1-9*

Happy Easter! We have become Easter people and what precious gift we have received. Alleluia!

The gospel reading today though ultimately ends on a joyful note, and a hopeful promise, is filled with poignant and baffling images. Images of deep sorrow for the loss of a loved one, fear of the horrific suffering of their master that they've witnessed the previous day, and the anxiety over the bewildering scene that their friend was not in the tomb where he was laid to rest. Instead, they found an empty tomb, littered with the strips of linen and cloth with which they have bound and covered the lifeless body of their beloved teacher.

Experiences of emptiness in our lives also hold the innate promise of transformation to a new life. In the moments of emptiness, the disciples were held by their memory of love. The disciples clung to the memory of their experiences of Jesus, of love and acceptance and pardon. They remembered their witnessing of his healing and cleansing and forgiving; their feasting and playing and laughter and the moments of reaching out to Abba, in the mountains and on the lakeshore, to be grateful and be humble to what is holy within and around them.

The Easter narratives are gifts of both hindsight and insight. We receive a new sight, a 20/20 vision that moves and enlivens the core of our being. This happens more often than not, when we stop in our tracks from our pre-occupied and sometimes distracted lives and behold moments and spaces of mysterious emptiness. Easter happens in that sacred space where God alone can gift us with the light that we need to transcend the darkness. The ensuing happenings after the disciples' experience of the empty tomb awakened their consciousness to God's new presence. Entering the tomb, they "saw and believed" and they only desired to share the good news to everyone. The life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus were recognized as a mysterious and deep truth of Life. This is the rich heritage of our faith that we received in baptism, when we put on a new self, a garment in the risen Christ: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." We, indeed become Easter people!

Many times, when I lived and worked in East Africa and later on in southern Africa, I've been enriched with moments of Easter. In a village of resettled landless people from densely populated areas, I encountered, repeatedly, people who even if they are deprived access to resources vital to life by social, political and cultural systems, do not cease to share their meager resources with others with less. It is not unusual for me to experience a mother offering her maize flour to a family who has not eaten for a number of days, knowing that she won't have enough for her own family for the evening meal. When a drought and famine occurred in our area, the regional authorities requested our parish to administer the distribution of food relief. The villagers who volunteered to help with the weekly distribution always made sure that the widows and orphans and the poorest families were given their portions first.

Easter is Ma Ntombi, a young, gentle and reserved single mother from a rural area in South Africa, who came to Cape Town in search for a better life for herself and her two children. They've been living in a one room shack made of corrugated iron, cardboard and plastic sheeting. The strong winds and bitter cold of the winter months at the Cape and the oppressive heat during the summer have undermined their health and minimized her opportunities to seek employment. When the residents of the informal settlement started organizing to petition the municipality for better housing, Ma Ntombi deeply felt the importance of her participation in the endeavor. She spoke with so much passion about her love of her family, and that building a good home for her family is also building the community and ultimately building the fairly new nation that is still steeped in inequality and discrimination.

We engage our world the way we see and understand it. Easter is the experience of seeing God as God sees, so we can transcend the confining borders of conventions that prevent us from encountering and engaging the widening web of life. Easter is announced by people who consistently choose to simplify their lives so that the resources of the earth can sustain life for all. A coastline community in the Cape chose not to have tarmac roads and to not be included in the electrical grid of the municipality. Rather they chose to invest in developing renewal sources of energy from sun and wind for their light and other energy needs.

Easter happens when a situation of conflict is engaged through dialogue and mediation rather than violence. A group of young development practitioners came to learn skills of listening and appreciative inquiry as they prepare to negotiate with a mining company trying to buy off from the people their traditional and communal land used for growing their food.

Easter suffuses our lives. It calls us to a practice of contemplation, that we may discover the many ways of communing with God, through the many expressions of life that surrounds us. How do we find Easter in our daily life? How do we deepen the experience of Easter in our lives amidst the din that progress and modernization creates? Let our experiences of Easter embolden us to announce the good news; to work to transform the despair of an empty tomb to entering into a new consciousness suffused with the light of our risen Lord?

Easter us, Lord of the resurrection. Thrust us into a consciousness that claims and proclaim joy, energy, courage, freedom in your New Creation. Alleluia!

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, social justice and integrity of creation

200 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001

202-832-1780 ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org