

Easter Sunday, 2018
John 20.1-9

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit and a poet of the 19th century, exults:

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God...
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

(God's Grandeur, 1877)

If we are alert and care to notice, every day without fail, and any number of times each day, at every turn we encounter good, truth and beauty. We are given reason to hope.

There are reasons this might not be the case. We are culpably in too much of a hurry and culpably distracted by all sorts of trivial concerns, which leave our sensibilities numb. Still, good, truth and beauty abound and beckon us at every turn.

It is the lot - as well as the privilege of a priest – to accompany people in the most difficult of circumstances, even when only evil, deceit, and ugliness appear to prevail. Yet, it never ceases to amaze me how those, who are the most sorely tested and with little apparent reason to continue to hope, often remain keenly alert, even to their last breath, to the smallest, most opaque instances of good, truth and beauty.

In this *vale of tears*, we celebrate Easter as *already* as well as *not yet*. St. Paul acknowledges that now we see as in a mirror, dimly - mirrors of his time produced only a blurred and undefined reflection (1Corinthians 13.12).

He acknowledges that awaiting what we see only dimly means awaiting it with patient endurance (Romans 8.25). "...we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8.23). Moreover, "...all creation groans and is in agony until now" (Romans 8.22).

Nonetheless, St. Paul assures us:

"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard,
nor has it so much as entered the human heart
what God has prepared for those who love him."
(1 Corinthians 2.9)

On April 3, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, addressed a gathering of sanitation workers in Memphis, TN. He exclaimed: "...I've been to the mountaintop...[God's] allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land..." The next day, he was assassinated.

Some among us may have been to the mountaintop and been given a glimpse of the Promised Land, and this experience makes for hope that is robust, stable and firm.

Others soldier on with only an indistinct inkling of what is yet to be. Still others racked with doubt have just given up hope and, frankly, the church, as we present ourselves and our beliefs, is at times of little help.

No matter, Easter calls us to acknowledge and embrace the good, the truth and the beauty – the light, the joy and love – that cannot be denied.

An eminent Catholic thinker, considered by many the most eminent Catholic thinker since St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the 13th century, frequently admitted that throughout his life he struggled simply to believe and to hope. His keen intellect allowed him to probe and to explain the teachings of the church, but hope is not rooted in the intellect, nor in theology or catechism.

He wrote: “Wherever you may find yourself at this particular moment, follow the light, even though it is yet dim; guard the fire even though it burns low as yet...Go, and you will find hope, and your hope is already blessed...with the grace of fulfillment” (Karl Rahner, *Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today*).

He employs the image of light - distant, enveloped in darkness, weak and flickering, on the verge of being extinguished at any moment. But, he argues, why should I not choose to move toward the distant light rather than surrender to the darkness?

Driving Interstate 8 across the southeast corner of CA, one is amazed at how for many miles nothing – nothing! – breaks the horizon. Yet I have known individuals who have taken on that vast and harrowing desert, not once but a number of times, one weary step after one weary step - in hope! In hope of attaining a merely decent existence.

Another eminent Catholic penned this hymn, years before he became Roman Catholic:

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom.

Lead Thou me on.

The night is dark, and I am far from home.

Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet.

I do not ask to see the distant scene.

One step enough for me.”

(John Henry [Cardinal] Newman, 1833)

One more hope-filled step. That is all Easter asks of any of us. One more hope-filled step is what Easter empowers us to take. Of those whose hope is robust, stable and firm, Easter asks that they hasten to bolster the hope of the faltering and those on the verge of giving up.