

April 4, 2021: Easter Sunday
Feb 23, 2021
by Mary M. McGlone

I sometimes shop at a store that offers a cash back coupon each year. During *anno* COVID-19, I hardly frequented any stores, and when I did finally get to this one, I didn't have the right copy of the coupon. I was unable to redeem it. In the end, it was worth pretty little and I was too late. Another opportunity missed.

I recalled that as I pondered Paul's words to the Colossians in this reading for Easter Sunday. His message is something like this: "If you were raised with Christ, you have a super, ever-redeemable coupon." Paul believed that in baptism we receive an irrevocable writ of absolute freedom and vision having no expiration date. This is no thing we own, rather, it is a growing seedling of all we can become.

In today's first reading, Peter reiterates his favorite homily theme. He explains the meaning of Jesus' life, martyrdom and resurrection. Peter's short Gospel says this: "Filled with God's Holy Spirit, Jesus went around doing good, healing and beating out the devil until 'they' put him to death. But no matter what some powerful 'they' thought they had accomplished, God raised Jesus from the dead. In turn, Jesus commissioned us to preach God's forgiveness. The point is that his story can be ours!"

The essence of both these readings is that those who know they have been raised with Christ can bet their very lives on the fact that they will not just survive or simply overcome the power and wrath of evil, but they will actually thrive by passing through it.

Paul tells the Colossians, "set your minds on what is above." This could sound like escapism or the slave religion that says, "Pay no mind to what happens on earth, only heaven matters." In fact, it is the very opposite. Paul uses the word *phroneo*, translated as "think of" or "set your mind on." This word implies far more than reasoning or simple remembering. According to various scholars, Paul's *phroneo* expresses an invitation to take on an entire way of thinking, feeling and acting. It refers to a way of perceiving life that colors everything one does. In other places, Paul expresses this as putting on the mind of Christ.

In the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus called people to *metanoia*, a new way of life based on faith that the reign of God is near. Putting on the mind of Christ takes that a step further. To put on the mind of Christ means to open oneself to seeing from the vantage point of the risen Christ, the historical Jesus who is now "at the right hand of God," or in more contemporary terms, the human Jesus transformed and knowing himself as risen Son of God and giver of the Spirit.

Seeing from Christ's vantage point implies more than the sympathetic perception we learn from a story or listening to another's experience. Paul wants us to realize that once raised with Christ, we can perceive everything from Christ's own vantage point. Paul does not ask us to go around thinking of heaven, but rather to understand every detail of our life and struggles from the perspective of Christ's victory. Instead of taking us away from the nitty gritty, this pushes us ever more deeply into it. Thus, filled with faith in the divine destiny of the universe, we help it come true every step of the way.

Although it might sound like Paul came into his awareness of seeing from above in a flash on the road to Damascus, it's more likely that he grew gradually in understanding what faith in Christ meant for him and the world. That was surely the case with Jesus' closest friends. They found the empty tomb and they worried and wondered. Long after encountering the risen Jesus, they continued to grow in the process of understanding and integrating what his resurrection meant for him, for them, and for the world.

While candles glow, bells ring, and we sing Alleluia, today's readings counsel us that there's far more here than we have begun to comprehend. There's probably no one reading this who does not believe in the resurrection. Nevertheless, the saints starring in today's Scriptures, our friends who enjoy a different and fuller perspective than we, would tell us that it takes more than a lifetime to begin to comprehend what it means.

Seeing from above, having access to Christ's vantage point is a grace that we have a right to claim based on our baptism. That's one facet of the mystery the resurrection. We live in an *anno domini*; we are assured of Christ's victory over every form of evil. How different would life be if we would really believe that everything is redeemable, with no expiration date?