

Homily for Easter 2010

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Senior, was a doctor. As such he was very interested in the use of ether. Ether is a compound that has a strong smell like turpentine, and was used to put people to sleep during surgeries. In order to know how his patients felt under its influence, he once had a dose administered to himself.

As he was going under, in a dreamy state, a profound thought came to him. He believed that he had suddenly grasped the key to all the mysteries of the universe. When he regained consciousness, however, he was unable to remember what the insight was.

Because of the great importance this thought would be to mankind, Holmes arranged to have himself given ether again. This time he had a stenographer present to take down the great thought. The ether was administered, and sure enough, just before passing out the insight reappeared. He mumbled the words, the stenographer took them down, and he went to sleep confident in the knowledge that he had succeeded.

Upon awakening, he turned eagerly to the stenographer and asked her to read what he had uttered. This is what she read: "The entire universe is permeated with a strong odor of turpentine."

Tonight/Today we celebrate the mysteries of the Universe which have already been given to us freely. God came to earth, and took our human flesh and blood to show us what life is all about. He walked among us and taught the truth. He suffered and died on the cross. He rose from death and destroyed its power, He opened for us a way to

enter into His eternal life. Now, he continues, day after day to give to us His love, strength and forgiveness. He gives us his own flesh and blood to feed us. Why?

That story of Doctor Holms represents the intense desire of human beings to understand our purpose. We want to understand why we are alive. Unfortunately, many of us are like the doctor under the influence of ether. We never seem to find a satisfactory answer, so we accept the muddled confusion of thoughts that our culture sets before us. But aside from Christ, human life makes no sense at all.

Christ went to great lengths to teach us the truth. He answered, without confusion, the great question that humanity has always struggled with; “what is the meaning of life?”

This question has been the serious study of the Catechumens who *will join our Church tonight*. (Who have joined our Church last night.) They had to begin their journey into the light of Christ by asking themselves “Why?” Why was I born? Why do I put up with relationships that are difficult? Why should I give of myself? Why should I care about God or religion?

The answer is so simple and clear. *It is because God loves us*. He wants us to know him. He wants us to know of our dignity as His sons and daughters. He longs for us to be at peace and have joy and delight in life.

If we don't understand God's love, we are content with what the Discovery Channel or the History Channel tells us is the meaning of Christ and of life. And that has a strong odor of turpentine.

Without Christ's light to guide us we stumble, become afraid and get confused about the purpose of our lives and the good we should strive for. Many people have a deep and dreadful sense that their lives have produced no good thing, only confusion, decay and misery for all they touch. They laugh at the thought of human dignity, because it is so foreign to them. They end up hating themselves and their lives.

They laugh at Christ and his promises because they have only experienced falsehood and broken promises.

A friend of mine decided to take a trip around the world, as he said "to find himself." He ended up in the Holy Land, and as he toured Jerusalem, he was disgusted with the commercialism and the hype of the various shrines that marked the events of Jesus' life.

On one day he went on a tour with an old French archeologist and a bible scholar. The archeologist was a confirmed cynic. At each place they visited the old guide qualified every descriptions of the site with words like, "Perhaps near hear ..., it is said ..., tradition says ...," and always ending with "but who knows?"

At the end of the day, the old man took my friend to one last place. In the center of the ancient city, they entered a private house and made their way down some stairs to a new excavation below the house. "Here" he said, pointing to some recently uncovered stone slabs, "This was only recently uncovered. It is the threshold of the gate to the city of Jerusalem at the time of Herod. Here you see part of the city wall. The stone was buried when the Romans leveled the city in 70 A.D. That Jesus of Nazareth

stepped on this stone as he left the city to be hung on the cross is certain”

My friend was suddenly overcome. He bent down and kissed the stone that Jesus’ foot had touched. He said, “I suddenly knew this much; that here God had touched the earth, and now he has touched me”. He only found himself when he found the presence of Jesus Christ.

Why did Jesus suffer, why did He die? The answer that kept coming back to my friend with overwhelming clarity was that God did all this to demonstrate that His love was real. My friend kept saying, “I realized He wanted **me** to know that He loved **me**. He wants **me** share His life and love”.

As my friend will now tell you, you do not need the effects of ether; you don’t have to go to Jerusalem or around the world to finally find answers that will give life meaning. We don’t have to search through archeology to find where God has touched the earth.

The place where God has touched the earth is here, tonight/today. Here is where he touches us, by inviting us into the mysteries of his passion death and resurrection. He does not touch us from the stale residue of an old stone, He touches us with his flesh and blood here on this Altar. The Eucharist we share tonight/today is the continuation of all that he did in His suffering, dying and rising. That restorative power, the grace of those events is given to us tonight/ today at this Altar.

Why? *Simply because he loves us.* That is the key to understanding the mysteries of the Universe.

Without the central truth that Gods loves us, nothing in life, let alone religion, makes sense. If we distrust God’s

love, despair finds a foothold in our lives. We find false truths and we confuse truth with popular thought; whatever society at the time tells us truth is. We give into hopelessness and become friends with cynicism and selfishness.

The light of Jesus love is proclaimed in the dark confusion of our world tonight/ today. The light of Jesus which has destroyed hopelessness and death and rendered it powerless is what we proclaim tonight/ today. That is why we celebrate the Resurrection.

It is not a vain hope.

For people of faith it is a statement to the world that Gods love is real, it is here among us, and it has power to lift us out of despair and restore to us what we thought was lost; hope, joy, peace and dignity.

Tonight/today we touch the place where God has touched the Earth. This is the celebration of his victory over death. This is the triumph and the exultation of life. He gives his own body as food and his own blood as drink and all who will open their eyes will see his face. And without earning it, we are given the gift of his love and forgiveness. This is what we dare to hope for; a share in his divine and everlasting life.