

March 27, 2016 Easter Sunday Homily:

Brothers and sisters, with the recent passing of Harper Lee, America lost one of its most distinguished writers. Over a half-century ago, She penned her most famous novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird", which, to this day, is perhaps the most widely read book in the Western world. The book's title is not without significance for understanding the author's intent. According to scholars, it is a metaphor meaning "to hurt someone who has done no wrong." Recall that in the novel a young, widowed father of two children, Atticus Finch, a respected attorney, is called upon to defend a young man of color, who is falsely accused of committing a capital crime. A man of honesty and integrity, he defends the young man with great skill. Nevertheless, he fails to exonerate his client. The condemned man is a victim of gross injustice and is sentenced to death by hanging. All is lost! Or is it?

The black people of that small community are a people of faith and live in the light of the risen Jesus. They are confident that the unjust verdict eventually will be overturned by the Supreme judge of all, the Heavenly Father. Evil never has the final word. Perhaps the most memorable words in the book are spoken by Atticus to his confused, young daughter, Scout. His wise words are worth noting; "One cannot truly understand another without stepping into his shoes."

For the black community of that small Southern town, Jesus, the Eternal Word, truly stepped into the shoes of their condemned brother. He follows the worn path of those who are victimized by injustice, hatred, prejudice and bigotry.

In the account of our Lord's resurrection, the divine verdict trumps the human verdict. Bear in mind that in Our Lord's time, crucifixion was seen as the death of a man accursed and forsaken by God. Under Roman law, No citizen of Rome could be executed in such a barbarous fashion. The four evangelists are one in maintaining the innocence of Jesus. In his address to the Jewish leaders, St. Peter speaks with passion and conviction. He cries, "It was you who accused the Holy and upright one, you who demanded that a murderer be released to you, while you killed the Prince of Life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and we are his witnesses" (Acts 2:22-24). In the end, God proves Himself victorious over betrayal, injustice, death and lies. The words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled in Jesus, the suffering servant: "And I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near." (Is. 50:7-8).

On this day of Our Lord's vindication by his Father, Easter Sunday, we rejoice that evil does not have the last word that love is stronger than death, and that light is more powerful than darkness. God has acted. He has raised up Jesus. The tomb is empty!

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger once wrote that "Easter is the brilliance of an open door." The tomb can seem like a jail cell for which there is no key. It is a dark and cold place. On Easter morning, a bright light shines in the tomb, a very dark place, indeed, it shines in the tombs of all Christians who await their resurrection from the dead, even as they share in the Risen light during their earthly pilgrimage. In recent years the number of innocent Christians victimized by acts of terrorism has skyrocketed. By publicly acknowledging their faith in Christ, they were branded as criminals by their enemies. Still, we have good reason to rejoice and be glad. Those who perished for their Christian witness are assured that in the life hereafter they will be exonerated by the One who Judges the living and the dead, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who, himself, suffered the same fate as millions of other innocent people, past and present, who were condemned to death, even though they were among the righteous and undeserving of such a cruel and inhumane punishment.

Amen!