

I Easter 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Hymn 100 St John 20.19

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Hymns can be a source of inspiration and strength. Like the Gospel narratives...they tell a story through the author's words and composer's music. Our opening hymn..."The Sabbath Day was by" (#100 Hymnal 1940)...tells the entire Easter Story in five short verses.

The hymn is based on an "Easter Carol for Children" in a book of poetry entitled *Vita Nova (New Life)*...written by Father Howard Chandler Robbins in 1929. Canon Charles Winfred Douglas composed the music especially for this hymn in 1940. Both were witnesses for Christ who told the Easter Story...one through his words...one through his music.

All four Gospel writers—[Matthew](#), [Mark](#), [Luke](#), and [John](#)—tell the Easter Story of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The stories differ in specific details and in the writers perspectives. Together they give us a rich, full, account of the Resurrection.

Luke records Jesus appearing to two of his disheartened disciples on the Emmaus Road. The disciples didn't recognize Jesus, until they asked him to stay with them and have a meal. Jesus in his resurrected body, made himself know to his disciples by having a meal with them. We explicitly state in the Apostles' Creed we believe in the Resurrection of the body...not the continuation of a disembodied spirit.

Last week's Gospel from John, concluded with the Peter and John heading to their own homes, shocked at having found Jesus' grave empty. Mary Magdalene stays behind at Jesus' grave crying when two angels dressed in white ask her why she is crying. She repeats what she told Peter and John earlier, "they" have taken the body of Jesus away. Jesus then appears to her, but in her grief she doesn't recognize him. Jesus asked Mary why she is crying.

Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener and asks him if he has taken the body away to tell her where he has taken him so she can go get him. Jesus makes himself known to her by calling her by name, "Mary". She then recognizes Jesus. It is one of the most poignant scenes in the Bible. Jesus calls us by name like a shepherd calls his sheep...and we come to him. We will hear more about shepherds and sheep next week.

This morning's Gospel commences with the disciples hiding behind locked doors waiting for what was to happen next. They were in fear for their lives. It is likely the Blessed Mother, Mary Magdalene, and other women were also present. Jesus makes a sudden and startling appearance...his resurrected body didn't need to knock and have the door opened. Jesus first has to calm everyone down and says, "Peace be with you." He shows them the wounds in his hands and side. The Gospel tells us they were filled with joy at seeing Jesus again. He once again says to them, "Peace be with you."

Jesus then instructs his disciples to go out into the world...they become the *apostoloi*...the "sent out ones". He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins they are forgiven; if you do not forgive then, they are not forgiven." These are the same words the bishop says when he lays his hands on a man and ordains him a priest.

A key part of the Divine Commission...the power to forgive sins...was specifically delegated by Jesus to his disciples and their successors...the bishops and priests of the Church in direct line of succession from the Apostles. While ultimate authority rests with God, Jesus gave His Apostles and their successors the authority to forgive or retain sins, empowering them to act in His name to bring reconciliation.

The characters in the Easter story are more than just historical figures we read about in the Bible. Their Easter experience is our Easter experience. We share Mary Magdalene's sorrow when she saw Jesus die and get put in the grave. We share her confusion about what might happen next. We share her surprise at seeing it was no gardener but Jesus standing in front of her,, calling her by name, "Mary."

Mary Magdalene, Peter, even Thomas once he put aside his doubts, were first-hand witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus. They have a story to tell. Father Robbins and Canon Douglas are more recent witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus through their own unique gifts or poetry and music. They too have a story to tell. We need to listen and never stop telling the story.

The last verse of our Opening Hymn takes us back to the locked room and the disciples and the women. Jesus brought them glad surprise. They were happy to see their friend once more. We are blessed (happy), who have not yet seen Jesus in his resurrected body, but love him and adore.

