

What was going on with Peter after denials and then no chance to say "sorry" to Jesus before he died? What do you think was in Mary's mind as she dragged herself to Jesus' tomb? What is in your mind as you are confined to your home and can't celebrate Easter as normal?

Today we are filled with fear and confusion. We feel lonely and worry about coming days. We are much like those first visitors to the tomb, whose eyes were cloudy and hearts were heavy as Easter morning dawned. Some couldn't wait to get to the tomb to finish showing their love in properly finishing burial traditions. Others were so overwhelmed with guilt they were struggling with what to do next.

In the same way we all come to the empty tomb with different foods on our plates. Our greatest problem with Easter is that we have "done it before," and it is easy to take today for granted or let traditions like dying eggs or buying new clothes get in the way of simply staring at the empty tomb and letting the enormity of that victory sink in!

There were many surprises on Easter morning, and Mary was an important one. She represented everything "wrong" with the world (with all of her burdens and baggage.) And at the same time she represented the power of grace as Jesus changed her life forever with his love for a woman that many had called "sinful."

She finally had her life given back, but as she headed to the graveyard, she (and all the disciples) felt they had lost their lives as Jesus lay buried in a tomb. They were convinced everything was lost, with no hope of moving on.

Boy, do we all know that feeling! Between Mary and Jesus we see life's extremes ... *for no matter how far Mary had gotten, and no matter how far Jesus had fallen, each and all arrive at same tomb.*

*That is the reality of this day. Much as we want to focus on bright dresses, Easter baskets, and the joy of family and spring, it is the tomb that this day forces us to face.*

And the POWER of Easter not the "goodness" of Mary (or Jesus) *but empty tomb!* No matter how loved all the "Mary's" of world are ... all, like Mary, still wind up at the tomb.

Changes in Mary's life would mean nothing if death held Jesus. Despite her turnaround, her future was still colored by death. And it is the same for us. No matter WHAT death comes to all. But on this day, *this tomb was empty!*

Jesus changed Mary's world, and now it was her turn to let that change others. She didn't need to memorize a speech, or sit in classes for weeks or month to do what she did next. She simply TOLD what she had seen and shared what was so freely gifted

And now it is your turn, and mine. What will we do because the tomb is empty? How neat it would be if EVERY DAY, for us, could be like this first Easter!

After my first wife died, I had the same grief, fears, and questions that everyone does. It didn't make sense, I didn't like it, and I worried about our kids. The fact that we have questions that can't be answered doesn't take away from the gift of this day or show a lack of faith. Just like Peter's denials or Mary's belief that Jesus was still dead were not evidence of a lack of faith or

love.

Faith isn't having all the answers but knowing that it is OK to wrestle with the questions. And a greater gift comes with the awareness that God always brings us peace. And that peace comes when we let go of our control and anguish and just wait. (That is the posture we call "Faith.") And in faith, darkness always is transformed by light!

When I was in my own dark time of grief, I had a dream one night where my wife Suzie, and her dad, who had died the year before were sitting close to each other. She turned and said to me, "It's OK." And that Easter, right before communion I noticed the one angel in the window with eyes open and somehow that became a message as well.

Every time I see that angel I think of Suzie. Somewhere along the line, when I quit fighting so hard and simply surrendered – and when faith is my gift – even the tomb looks different. And now, with Roxanne, my children, and all of you, there are new angels in my life who continue to help strengthen my gift of faith.

Most of us have never encountered what Mary did -- that blinding light angelic message as she stood in front of the tomb. You might not think you have ever seen an angel like Mary did, but I will bet you have. And you might be even more surprised to learn the times you have been that messenger to someone else. For when the surrender of faith is our Easter gift, faith empowers daily miracles that feed off the energy of Easter's empty tomb.

Faith is a matter of trusting that God will break through even into our tears, confusion, grief, and sorrow and will open hearts and eyes and living to his grace. And that whether we plan it or not, he will even use our living to "tell others" what it means that He is risen!

What the angelic messengers did for Mary was very simple. "First LOOK into empty tomb. Then GO AND TELL what you have seen so that the others can be changed too!"

I don't go to the cemetery any more. It is not that I didn't love, or because it is too painful, but I am sure it has to do with the angel's words, "Why seek the living among the dead?" It took time, but my miracle was when Easter became real for me.

LISTEN to the Gospel as if you are hearing it for first time! HE IS RISEN! We are no different from the first Easter visitors. We have doubts, tears, baggage and fears; yet when we take the time to see and believe, how can our lives not be changed?

And like Mary and Peter, now it is your turn to simply let that bright light of Easter reflect in your living. Let the empty tomb be the reflected light of your daily love! Amen.