

Easter has its share of wonderful stories. I'd like to share with you a favorite of mine.

A second-grade teacher decided to put on an Easter play. All of the children were given parts, although some of the parts were quite insignificant. One boy, for example, was given the part of the *stone* that was placed in front of Jesus' tomb. The teacher told this child that when it was time for the stone to be rolled aside so that Jesus could rise from the dead, all he needed to do was to move his hands in a circle and then step aside.

The first time they had a rehearsal, the boy got a running start and began to do a series of somersaults, at the end of which he knocked down several children. The teacher took him aside and told him that it simply was not necessary to be so dramatic. It would be sufficient for him merely to move his hands in a circle and then step to the side.

At the next rehearsal, the boy did the same thing—knocking the other children aside as he did his somersaults. The teacher decided that, rather than try to reason with him, she would offer him a different role instead. First she offered him the part of one of the *soldiers*, but he replied that he wanted to be the stone! Then she offered him the part of *Peter*. He thought a little longer about this possibility; but again he refused, insisting that he wanted to be the stone!

Finally, in exasperation, she offered him the highly coveted role of *Jesus* himself. The boy gave this careful thought before telling her that he still wanted to be the stone! When she asked him why he insisted on being the stone, he proudly replied: "Because when I let Jesus out of the tomb, it feels so good!"

In Saint Matthew's telling of the Easter event he relates that an angel descended from heaven and rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb and sat on it. Yet Mary Magdalene and the other women even though they witnessed the stone rolled away and heard the angel's words addressed to them were still very much afraid. In

their response they were very much like Peter in St. John's proclamation of the story, he too saw the stone rolled away but did not yet understand.

Of those first witnesses of the sight of the empty tomb with its stone rolled away only Peter's companion known as the "*Beloved Disciple*" is said to have "seen and believed." While on a purely physical, or even intellectual level, he does not understand the full significance of what he sees, he nevertheless believes that Jesus has risen from the dead. Why? Because he is the disciple whom Jesus loved. There is an intimate connection between *loving* and *believing*. If we think about it, we have all experienced it. When we know in the depths of our being that another truly loves us, we instinctively trust their word to us. We do not demand that they "prove their love". Their word lived by their action in our regard is enough. Having been loved by the Lord Jesus and having loved him in return, the "*Beloved Disciple*" was given by God the gift of faith and so was able both to see and believe.

This Easter, as every Easter, we stand before the tombs of our own hearts. As we look within, how do *we* respond?

Do we allow Jesus' sacrificial love to move us beyond Mary Magdalene's and the other women's fear and panic? If not, they will prevent us from seeing and recognizing God's presence and glory within ourselves and others, as well as in the places and events of our world.

Do we allow Jesus' wondrous love to move us beyond Peter's stunned, confused silence? If not, it will paralyze us and prevent us from living out the gifts of God's Spirit.

Do we allow Jesus' intimate love to enable us, as it did the beloved disciple, to see and believe? If we do, we will see and believe that Jesus' death and resurrection have removed the stones of our original sinfulness, and revealed to the light of day our original goodness. Then we can begin to respond in faith and commit ourselves to live out all that he taught by his word and example. And, like the little boy in the story—it will feel good to let Jesus out of the tomb!