

My Easter Sneakers

Rev. John Vertigan

April 24, 2011

Flipping channels on Maundy Thursday morning, I saw a commercial that caught my attentions.

A group of children, decked out for an Easter egg hunt, carrying baskets ready for the haul of eggs and candy they'll undoubtedly find, have pained faces, seared with anguish, as one among them runs faster than the rest, pulls away and, by implication, finds more and better stuff than they will find. The narrative says, "We have this certain brand of sneakers on sale right now. In fact, we have everything on sale that you will need in order to have an epic Easter."

I do, in fact, want to have an epic Easter.

And the store advertising with this commercial is open today for business as usual on this most unusual of days for the faithful. It hasn't always been so. Plenty of us remember the 'good old days' and the blue laws that prevented businesses from operating on Sunday, including Easter.

In Australia, the conversation between business and the church is much more controversial and public than here in the states. Business wants to open on Easter Sunday.... A taboo for many, many years. Listen to excerpts from a recent article about this controversy:

"The daily newspaper had a headline: "Block Buster Easter Weekend." And it will be. There will be important football matches and a four-day horse racing carnival. On Easter Monday the nation will celebrate what the majority of the population considers Australia's most important national day, Anzac Day. On this day all Australia stops to remember and recognize those who went to war, gave their lives in war, and currently serve in the Defense Forces in places like Iraq and Afghanistan."

"The five-day Easter long-weekend will be chock-a-block full with sporting and national observances as well as extended shop-trading hours, and the promise of "sales, sales, sales."

"And in the midst of this Christians will be observing two of the most important days in their faith life, Good Friday and Easter Day. The glorious celebration of Easter Sunday will now have to compete with a cacophony of the marketplace. People will have to choose between attending church and going to work."

"Church groups are protesting the lifting of the ban on Easter Sunday trading, saying that it is a spiritual issue, not an economic one. Bishop Philip Huggins, chair of the Melbourne Anglican Social Responsibilities committee, said allowing shops to open would create difficulties for families. "Easter Sunday is a holy day which would only be impoverished by the sheer banality of longer shopping hours, rendering more difficult the family life of staff and small business owners," Bishop Huggins said. "We all need times, whether we are Christian or not, when we can just take a breath. Our society does not need more busy shopping days."

Bishop Huggins said. "Easter Sunday is so very beautiful, woven into the fabric of our society; it is a celebration of hope and love, made vivid and powerful in the Risen Jesus. It is a holy day of depth and wonder. Nothing needs to be added to it."

"Easter Sunday is so very beautiful, woven into the fabric of our society; it is a celebration of hope and love, made vivid and powerful in the Risen Jesus. I do, in fact, want to have an epic Easter.

But let's talk about a different kind of sneaker.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. Witness Mary Magdalene sneaking to the tomb under the cover of night. Witness her, as other narratives tell us, bringing spices and ointments to the tomb, sneaking around the guards who maintained watch on the place lest his disciples steal the body and make silly claims about resurrection.

Witness those very disciples sneaking with haste to the same spot, quiet as could be, maybe, lest they cause a scene and bring attention to themselves. Witness them sneaking back to their beds lest someone see them, accuse them, and bring each one a cross of their own.

“Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.”

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

This woman, Mary, whom Jesus cleansed of seven demons; this woman, Mary, called the apostle to the apostles ... the witness to those would be witnesses, this visionary and leader of the early Jesus movement; this Mary who we find this morning as the first sneaker to the tomb of Jesus, she was the first to have an epic Easter.

Bishop Huggins said. “Easter Sunday is so very beautiful, woven into the fabric of our society; it is a celebration of hope and love, made vivid and powerful in the Risen Jesus. It is a holy day of depth and wonder.”

So here’s the commercial I’d like to see next time I’m flipping channels on a Holy Thursday before Easter: A group of people, decked out for another day of living in a challenging world of hurts and cares, carrying their hearts ready for the haul of love and compassion and grace they’ll undoubtedly find, some openly wearing pained faces, some seared with anguish, some carrying wrinkles of doubt, some carrying makeup to cover the shame and guilt and sorrow of a life lived tough, all vulnerably showing their true and hopeful selves to the world and their faith community, as one among them runs faster than the rest; one named Mary pulls away and, by implication, finds first the more and better and abundant life that they too will find. The narrative says, “I have seen the Lord!” In fact, I have seen everything that you will need in order to have an epic Easter.”

I do, in fact, want to have an epic Easter.

I suspect you do, too. That’s why you’re here. And if that’s not why you are here; if you’re here by parental cajoling or because of an old tradition whose meaning is lost on you, if you’re here because you think you have to be to be good, because it’s the one day of the year you attend worship, if you’re an Easter sneaker who wants to come and go this morning without attracting attention; whatever your motivations for getting up and getting here today, let this be what you take away: “I have seen the Lord!” In fact, I have seen everything that you will need in order to have an epic Easter.”

Have an epic Easter. Take a breath. It’s a gift to you today.

Be at peace, and be in touch, will you?