April 21, 2019: Easter Sunday... The Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ

I remember the Easter when I was in seventh grade. We were preparing to go to Mass but we wanted to find our Easter baskets first. We knew that they were hidden somewhere in the house, but my Mom said ‘no.’ It might have had something to do with the fact that the year before I had passed out, as I was altar serving because I ate too much candy too quickly. Therefore, we had to wait until we returned home. As we piled into the station wagon after Mass, I was pretty excited to get home and look for my basket, but when we got home there was a problem. When we walked into the house, we found green plastic grass, small pieces of tin foil, boxes torn open, and just a huge mess all around the house. Our golden retriever Max managed to find all of the baskets and ate everything in them. He, of course, then managed to get very sick in multiple places in the house (fortunately, considering what he ate he was fine). Needless to say, we were shocked by what we found since it was not at all what we expected.

As human beings we usually have a predetermined sense of how events will work out. And, when they turn out differently, we do not always know how to react initially. When events do not match our expectations, it can really throw us for a loop. I can admit that I was not happy with Max; I was really looking forward to the candy. Nevertheless, I had to simply accept what happened and move on. However, there are times when things happen, so outside our realm of understanding, that we are at a complete loss as to know how to react or understand their meaning.

Think about what the apostles must have felt like 2000 years ago. They saw Jesus whipped literally almost to death. They watched Him walk a punishing road carrying the very cross that would kill Him. He had fallen multiple times, as people spat at Him, jostled Him, berated and insulted Him along the whole way. They then saw Him placed on the cross and nails driven through his body, and then the cross hoisted up and allowed to slam into place. The whole weight of his body placed on the nails was tearing Him apart. He lasted but a few hours and then gave out his death cry and breathed his last. They knew that his body was carefully taken down and placed in a tomb. Jesus was dead; if the apostles knew nothing else, they knew that. They also knew that you do not come back from the dead. Jesus had raised Lazarus, the little girl, and the widow’s son, but now He was dead and nothing could be done for Him. The hopes they had for Him and through Him seemingly died with Him.

However, three days after these events they started to hear some amazing things about Jesus. It did not make any sense at all. First Mary Magdalene came to tell them a strange tale, saying that she saw angels at the tomb and encountered Jesus. Peter and John ran to the empty tomb to see what she was talking about, and all they saw was his burial cloths, but no Jesus. Then, they encountered Him! He came to speak to them as they hid behind locked doors. He showed them who He was. Still, they did not really understand what was happening. Did they imagine it? Was He really there? When they told Thomas, he doubted and would not believe unless he could put his hand in Jesus’ side and his finger in the hole in Jesus’ hand. Cleopas and his companion then came to the upper room to tell the disciples about their encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Each incident seemed more confusing than helpful. What does the empty tomb mean? How could Jesus show up in their midst? After all He is dead!

It would take some time and more encounters with Jesus. It would take the Holy Spirit and a massive infusion of grace for them to begin to understand just what it was that happened. What we celebrate today is the very foundation of our faith. As Saint Paul wrote to us, “But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if, in fact, the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If, for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.”
It would take time for the disciples to unpack what had happened. Over the next forty days Jesus would continue to show up. And then, as He left them, He promised another would come—the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would make all things clear to them. And He did! Each encounter with both Christ and the Holy Spirit would begin to change both their expectations and how they saw the world. They started to see the world through God’s plan of salvation. God wants only one thing for us—to be in union with Him. And, we can do that only through our faith in Christ (non-believers can be saved, but still, only through Christ).

We gather each Sunday for one reason—to encounter the risen Jesus. It is through the Eucharist that we come to be united to Him, and through the Eucharist that our hearts can be changed and transformed. The Eucharist is the celebration that helps us both realize and proclaim with every fabric of our being the truth that the disciples learned so long ago. He is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia!! Alleluia!!

A Happy and Blessed Easter to one and all!

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian