

Each morning as the sun rises, nature speaks of resurrection. The light of day dispels the darkness of night. Bitter cold gives way to warmer temperatures. We wake from sleep to start a new day. Even though the snows of winter try to hold on for one last storm, we know that a life-giving spring is coming soon. The snow will melt, rivers will fill with fresh water, days grow longer. All that grows will come back to life. Like each day, each season speaks of resurrection. Easter lilies speak to the cycle of our liturgical seasons.

With the pandemic, it seems as if we have been in an extended year-long period of Lent. Fasting, penance, alms giving and prayers. Isolation, masks, and vaccines. Illness, sickness, and death in unimaginable numbers. The Lord knows our pain and suffering. He experienced it firsthand in the scandal of the cross. "He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; but the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all" (Isa 53:5-6).

"When Christ was dead, but still hung on the cross, a soldier came and pierced his side with a lance and immediately there poured out water and blood. Now the water was a symbol of baptism and the blood, of the holy eucharist."ⁱ From the pierced side of a lifeless Jesus, the Church is born. Cleansing water gives rebirth; sin is washed away. The Blood of Christ washes away our sin and offers us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. "As God then took a rib from Adam's side to fashion a woman, so Christ has given us blood and water from his side to fashion the Church. God took the rib when Adam was in a deep sleep, and in the same way Christ gave us the blood and the water after his own death."ⁱⁱ

Colder than any winter, darker than any night, the Son of God descended into death to bring light and life and resurrection to all who had died marked with the signs of faith. When Jesus gave up his spirit: "The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many" (Mt 27:50-53).

"All-powerful and ever-living God, your only Son went down among the dead and rose again in glory. In your goodness raise up your faithful people, buried with him in baptism, to be one with him in the everlasting life of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever."ⁱⁱⁱ Christ is risen! Alleluia, Alleluia!

As our hearts yearn for freedom and socialization and an end to the pandemic, we gather together this Easter morning to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior. There is doubt and uncertainty as to when this will all end. We know not the hour nor the day when fear of the virus will be a but thing of the past. In John's Gospel on that first Easter morning, there is also much doubt and uncertainty.

Jesus has risen from the dead. The battle over sin and death has been won ... but nothing is in focus yet. Mary of Magdala fears the body of Jesus has been stolen from the tomb. Peter and another disciple see the same empty tomb, but they too are at a loss. "For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead" (Jn 20:9).

Slowly Jesus helps the disciples to understand. He appears to Mary of Magdala and explains that she must not hold onto him but allow for God's plans to unfold. Jesus enters a locked room where the Apostles hide for fear of the Jews. He offers them peace and the breadth of God. He appears to two other disciples on the road to Emmaus. "And he said to them... 'How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?'" (Lk 24:25-26).

Uncertainty and doubt slowly give way to understanding and belief as the Resurrection comes into focus. Jesus helps us to see the bigger picture of salvation history. Jesus is only the first born of the dead. Jesus died that all of us might be set free from sin and death. The joy of Easter morning is repeated each time a worthy soul dies bound for heaven. The joy of Mary of Magdala, of Peter and the Apostles, and of the other disciples is repeated each time heaven opens its pearly gates and those who have preceded a person in death welcome home a newly risen soul who has just entered eternity.

And what of our uncertainty and doubt as the pandemic continues with hints of a new springtime on the horizon but no definite end in sight. We must stay close to Jesus. Life is utterly absurd without God. With God, things come into slow focus. We listen in prayer, we care for one another, we reach out to our neighbor, we love others as God has first loved us. Darkness gives way to light. The dawn of a new day brings joy. We better understand suffering and death as a way to union with Christ by carrying our own cross.

Over the last year, new patterns and rhythms in our life have emerged. Some for the better, some for the worse. Those that divide are of the devil, those that unite and bring us together are of God. Let us prune the division so that unity may more abundantly blossom.

Once the disciples understood that Jesus had risen from the dead, they had a new mission to share the Good News. No longer were they mere students of Jesus. They must tell others and invite them to encounter the risen Christ. We are modern day disciples. God's mission for us is to continue sharing the Good News.

It is a true blessing to welcome you this Easter morning. Go and tell others. Invite them to celebrate in community the ongoing Good News of Resurrection and Divine Mercy. Invite others to hear the saving words of Jesus, to experience his love and forgiveness, to dine at the table of the Lord and to enjoy the fellowship of a community gathering as one with Christ as our Good Shepherd. Christ is risen! Alleluia, Alleluia!

ⁱ Good Friday office of Readings. **From the Catecheses by Saint John Chrysostom, bishop** (Cat. 3, 13-19: SC 50, 174-177)

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Holy Saturday Collect from Morning Prayer