

From the Pastor—April 11, 2021

Easter traditions One thing in our Grell household we always did was to color Easter eggs. It seems like we did this on Holy Saturday. I remember it being quite fun, although I haven't personally colored eggs in a long time. There were probably other "foodie" things we helped our Mom prepare. I think we usually ate Easter dinner at Grandma and Grandpa's home near Odell, and then at Grandma's Beatrice home after Grandpa passed away. Speaking of Grandma Hajek, it was a custom each year that her gift to us kids was a chocolate, hollow, Easter bunny. We really looked forward to those! Our family would usually go to both the Easter Vigil and the Easter Sunday morning Mass; I am so glad to have experienced these. One year, the Easter fire at the beginning of the Vigil in Beatrice got out of control. The acolyte and Father Danko had lit the fire at the front of church. I couldn't see exactly what happened, but there were some tense moments. The weather that year must have prohibited lighting the fire outdoors.

The Word Among Us I understand that our custom in St. Mary's and St. Joseph's has been to provide the Advent and Lenten editions of the publication The Word Among Us. I regret that we neglected to order these spiritual aids during the recent special seasons.

Caiaphas' Underground Jail One thing I learned in my preparation for preaching Holy Week, and in my personal spiritual growth, is about Jesus' sufferings overnight from Holy Thursday till Good Friday. As you know, the Gospels do not give us every detail of Our Lord's life and ministry. St. John's Gospel says that if everything about Jesus were to be written down, the whole world "could not contain all the books" that would be needed. In the Passion narratives of the four Gospels, we are told about Jesus being brought before several groups which saw themselves as Our Lord's judges and juries. These included Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pontius Pilate. We are told that the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane was at night, with torches and lanterns. Jesus was taken first to Annas and then to Caiaphas. We are given the phrase that "in the morning" the next phase began, which involved Pilate (he was not awoken in the dead of night as the Pharisees seemed so willing to be disturbed). In between Annas/Caiaphas and Pilate/Herod, there is great evidence of a jail cell of sorts beneath the home of Caiaphas, where Jesus was held in custody from 3:00 – 5:30 a.m. on Good Friday. This cell was referred to as the pit. Here, Jesus was scourged and mocked, prior to the Romans doing the same things under orders of Pontius Pilate. A pillar which Jesus was tied to in the pit is displayed for veneration in Jerusalem to this day. *** So much of my homilies for Holy Thursday and Good Friday were taken from a recently published book, *What Christ Suffered*, by Thomas W. McGovern, MD. I recommend this book.

More Than Bunnies and Springtime I like to keep an eye on the secular world even as I live and serve as shepherd in the world of religion. For some years now, I have noticed that Easter is spoken about in terms of springtime, new life, and family gatherings with the Easter Bunny's mysterious appearance for the children (and young at heart). These are good things, and they are quite helpful to bring us greater communion with one another. But my cautionary note to you would be to take care that Easter is always first and foremost about an event which ought to thrill our souls at all times: the Resurrection of Jesus, and that the tomb of Jesus was empty as empty can be on Easter morning. We do well

to recognize the ordering of time by the Church, and that the Easter celebration is widely celebrated through a 50-day season. Ascension Thursday is May 13, with Pentecost ending Easter's celebration on May 23. Do your best to enter into these days with great faith. Be like the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the day of the Resurrection, who allowed Jesus to join them in their dejection at his death only to receive the revelation that it was truly him when he broke the bread (celebrated the Eucharist). *** It is perhaps helpful to focus on Easter by considering its title in the ancient languages as derived from the word "paschal". Some countries would be confused at the word Easter, as they refer to this day as "Pascha" or a variation thereof. Pasch means Passover. And Passover refers to the flight of Moses and the people from Egypt to the Promised Land. For us, our Passover, our Pasch, is our flight from sin into the kingdom of God here, and in eternity. *** Be amazed at the Resurrection! Be in awe at such a loving Jesus to save you and me! If you can remain duly amazed and in awe, with the heart of a child, then you can feel free to engage like crazy with all of the Easter bunnies and springtime celebrations offered by our culture.

New Catholic Profession At our Easter Vigil, which was splendid and glorious in every way, we welcomed into our parish of St. Joseph's several new Catholics. They joined many thousands around the world who were baptized and joined us in full communion. I am struck by these words that these new Catholics are given to say to the priest, with the congregation as witnesses: "*I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.*" I was blessed to instruct our new Catholics and give them the information they needed to make this profession of faith authentically. The Holy Spirit did the actual work of conversion upon their hearts and minds. I would welcome each of you to pray upon the words of profession above and whisper them to the resurrected Lord so that Jesus knows your faithfulness in a world departed from him in so many ways.

My Easter Homily I wanted to give a quick recap of what I preached on Easter Sunday. I followed, basically, a 7-step presentation on the kerygma, or kernel, of our Christian faith:

1. God loves you and has an amazing plan for you.
2. Sin has disrupted this amazing plan.
3. Jesus loves you so much that he died for you.
4. Jesus asks for a radical re-orientation of our lives back to him.
5. Be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit.
6. Join his amazing Church which he founded.
7. Go and make disciples.

Please know of my Easter prayers for all of you!

God Bless You!!!

Father Grell