



Easter Sunday
April 24, 2011 A

DO YOU HAVE EASTER FAITH?

Greetings and Easter peace and joy to you and your loved ones! If you live in the area and do not normally come to church, we would love for you to return next weekend.

While it is a blessing that we can all gather together for worship on this Easter Day, the important question for us is: do you and I on this Easter Day 2011 have *Easter faith*—the faith that helps us find hope and new life in painful experiences of life?

Ancient folks believed that light and life could be found in dark places. People in the Stone Age decorated the deepest recesses of caves believing that through this ritual, they could somehow tap into the hidden powers of the caves.

In our Judeo-Christian Tradition, we note that the great moments of God’s inbreaking occurred in the darkness. In the Book of Genesis, we read how God created light out of darkness. In the Exodus story, it was at night that Pharaoh sent for Moses to take his people and go into the wilderness. It was also during the night watch that Jesus, the Light of the World, was born. Finally, today’s Gospel begins with the words “Early in the morning while it was still dark...” In the darkness of the Easter morning, some disciples met the Risen Christ.

Two thousand years later, as followers of this same Christ, we are called to look for Christ and good things in dark places. Many of these “dark places” are familiar to us, e.g., death of a loved one, loss of health, loss of love and friendship, loss of meaning, loss of faith. For many others, the “dark places” might be an aging parent caring continuously for a sick loved one with little or no support, fighting an addiction of some sort, quarreling with neighbors, and so on.

The question for us is ...

Can we, in the spirit of Mary, Peter and John, visit that “dark place” or tomb and believe that good can come from it? Fortunately, to bolster or inspire our faith, we have lots of wonderful examples of people whose lives give a resounding “yes!” to the above question. (The Resurrection is God’s resounding “yes!” to Jesus and all that he stood for, did, taught, and went through.)

In the dark place of his prison cell, St. Paul wrote some of his best epistles. The famous Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, wrote some of his best poetry in the darkness of his prison cell. Handel wrote part of his famous Messiah while in prison. It was while tending sheep on the lonely hills of Co. Antrim that God manifested himself to St. Patrick. These examples and millions of others down through the corridors of time, testify that “good things” can be discovered in “dark places.”

Support groups

In our own country each year, thousands and thousands of people join support groups because they, or a family member, are experiencing a problem of some kind. Participants in support groups become vulnerable and experience powerlessness (just like Jesus on the cross). But in confronting their “dark place” and their pain, they are greeted with love and support. As they are gradually lifted out of their place of suffering, they begin to experience new life. There is nothing magical about the process. Rarely, if ever, is there a quick overnight transformation. Rehabilitation or growth does not happen easily or quickly. Rather, it occurs through lots of prayers and hard work and the support of friends.

So, again, the important question is not so much “do I believe that God raised up Jesus 2,000 years ago?” but rather, “do I believe that God can raise up someone like you and me?” The existential question is not so much whether God empowered Jesus to come forth from the dark place of death, but whether you and I can believe that God can empower us to come forth from our dark place of pain, sin and suffering. Hopefully, our answer is a resounding “yes!” If so, we have *Easter faith*. If not, we are in need of some help, and that is okay as long as we are willing to take a first step toward acquiring the faith that will sustain us when we go through a tough stretch in life’s journey.

Allowing Easter faith to guide and empower our daily lives

The following two pieces were written by the popular spiritual author, Sr. Joyce Rupp.

“Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.” (John 16:20)

Remember the times you thought you couldn't endure the pain or the loss any longer? It seemed too much to bear. Maybe you are in a situation like that now. At such times it's difficult to believe that grief will be turned into joy. Others can assure us that the pain will pass with time, but usually everything in us doubts this. That's why we need to celebrate Easter continually. We need to recall and welcome the Easter story much more than just once a year. We celebrate Easter every time we look closely at the little surprises of joy in our lives. Each time we announce these joys to ourselves or to others, we are like the angels at the empty tomb announcing resurrection.

I know a woman who is never without the pain of four metal rods pressing in her back. Yet she has found joy beyond her daily pain. She relishes happiness in her relationship with her spouse, delights in her grandchildren, enjoys the beauty of the changing seasons. She is an Easter person who daily chooses to believe that she does not have to stay in the tomb of pain and discouragement.

*Risen Christ,
Lead me to my own Easter moments.
Clear my mind and open my heart
so I can see the surprising little joys
that are waiting to greet me today.*

Raised to New Life

There is one lesson in particular which I learn over and over again. It is the truth that I cannot control the difficulties of my life all by myself. Usually my anxiety level has to reach an intense level before I admit to this reality. Each time I re-learn how necessary it is to throw myself into the arms of God, I promise myself that I won't forget again. But somehow I always do. I guess its part of being human.

Easter is a wonderful reminder that we cannot get out of our troubles and our tombs all by ourselves. Even Jesus did not overcome his great obstacles alone. Jesus did not just rise up from the tomb by his own efforts. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that “This Jesus God raised up” to new life. It was the surrender of Jesus, heard so poignantly on the cross, that went with him into the tomb.

The Easter story assures us that we need God's guidance and strength and we need to let go of our own efforts to try to control life by ourselves. Let us place our hand in God's hand and trust that God can raise us

from our dead places just as Jesus was raised to new life.

*Amazing One,
there is much in me
that needs to be raised from the dead.
I place my trust in you
to resurrect my lifelessness.*

How do we attain Easter faith?

Faith is a gift from God. It cannot be bought. But we can assume that God is always very willing to offer it to all who are seeking it. How does a seeker of faith find it? Three suggestions:

- *Pray for it.* “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” is what someone in the Gospel said to Jesus.
- *Hang around with people who have the faith you seek.* I like the saying “faith is caught more than taught.”
- *Read books that inspire faith*—especially books that tell stories of people coming to faith. *The Seven Story Mountain* by Thomas Merton is a classic in this area.

Seeking Catholic Faith?

Faith has many characteristics. *Religious faith* is what enables us to believe in a Higher Power and to relate to that Higher Power. *Christian faith* enables us to believe in Jesus as the Divine Son of God. *Catholic faith* enables us to believe in and embrace all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches to be revealed by God.

For anyone interested in looking into Catholic Christianity, I have these recommendations:

- Join the Catholic inquiry process at Ascension or a parish close to you.
- Read *Rediscover Catholicism—A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose* by Matthew Kelly. This book is not just about Catholic beliefs; it is also about purposeful living, discovering God's dream for your life, becoming the best version of yourself. To learn more about the author, check www.matthewkelly.com.

Have a very blessed Easter,

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