

Easter Day, April 1, 2018

Easter People

When I was a young boy, we would get up early on Easter morning, and our family would go to the early Mass. We were not allowed to touch our Easter baskets until after church. My sisters and I could hardly wait until we returned home so that we could get to our chocolate bunnies. I always ate the ears first. After we ate Easter breakfast, we would get into the car and drive about an hour to my grandfather's farm. There my grandparents, cousins and aunts and uncles would gather and we would have a glorious Easter egg hunt. We kids would have a grand time playing together while the women would prepare Easter dinner and the men sat around discussing important topics.

However, for a boy of eight, Easter with its spring color and brightly decorated baskets wasn't nearly as exciting as Christmas. There was no comparison between the two. When I was a boy, we began preparing for Christmas around the beginning of November. I think now, it's August. I can remember the excitement about the Christmas parties, the voices of the carolers, decorating the Christmas tree, the lights, the smells, all of the things about Christmas. We didn't hang up Easter lights or visit the Easter bunny. Unless your birthday is on Easter, you don't even get any presents. No, for a boy of eight Christmas had it all over Easter. Christmas definitely had it. And if I had been

given a choice and was told that I could celebrate only one of the two, I know the one I would have chosen. And I'm probably not alone in that.

Picture the scene we have at Christmas. Can you see the stable? Can you smell the straw, feel the hot breath of the cattle? Can you hear the angels singing? All of these glorious smells and sounds and sights are there at Christmas, and then there is the baby lying in the manger. And what do we have to compare that to in this season? The cross, the nastiness of it all, and the pain – these are things we don't want to think about. The fact that Jesus died, of course, he rose from the dead, but we have to go through his death to get to the resurrection. No, we don't like to think too much about that scene. We would rather spend our time concentrating on Christmas and the baby. But my brothers and sisters, we are not followers; we are not disciples of the baby in the manger. We were not baptized into an infant in Bethlehem. We are baptized into Christ Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. We are resurrection people. We are people of Easter - you and I - Easter Christians, not Christmas Christians. In fact, this is the holiest day of the church year. This is the most glorious day of the church year.

We have just completed the celebration of Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday, we celebrated the feast of the Holy Eucharist, and also, that great command of Jesus to serve each other. This was made visible in the washing of feet, the sign to us that we are to follow in our master's footsteps. On Good Friday, we remembered that black and

terrible day when Jesus the wood of the cross for us. Last night we celebrated Christ as the light of the world in the lighting of the new fire and the Paschal candle. We recounted the story of salvation from the creation story through the Exodus down to the time of Christ. We celebrated the fact that we are resurrection people when we renewed our baptismal vows. And today we continue the celebration begun last night – the glorious resurrection of Christ: Christ who died for our sins, Christ who died to reconcile us to the Father, Christ who died in obedience to the will of God, Christ who through his death made all creation new. Everything became new, everything changed. It looked the same. People looked and felt the same on the morning of Easter, but something had happened because Christ turned the world upside down and all of creation became new. All of creation became reconciled to God. Easter morning is God the Father's acceptance of the gift of Jesus on Good Friday. On Easter morning the Father accepted the sacrifice of the Son, and through that we are given new hope; through that we are given the opportunity to become believers in the Word of God become flesh; through that we are given the opportunity in baptism to become one with the Word of God, become flesh, who died for our sins and who was raised up from the dead. Through that, because we are one with the Son, we are also sharers with him in eternal life. Oh, we are resurrection people. We are Easter people.

In the second reading for today, St. Paul was just beginning a case for the bodily resurrection of all through Christ. Some Christians at Corinth, even some Christians today, do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They thought Christ was raised, but doubted about the rest of us. Oh, we would live on in some spiritual fashion but not really raised from the dead. We live in a society that does not want us to think about death, but rather, that we deserve all things, even deserve to remain young, at least in appearance. Society does not like us to think about our eventual deaths. Do you believe that someday you are going to die? Of course you do, you and I just don't like to think about it much. Yet, your soul or spirit will live on and, someday when Christ returns, a body – a body that clearly is you will be joined to your soul and you will live body and soul in glory.

Let me explain it through some other words of Paul, this time to the Christians of Colossae. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory."¹ Your life is hidden, what does he mean by that? Earlier in the letter to the Colossians, he wrote, "You have been buried with him by your baptism; by which, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead."² In other words, through our union with Christ in baptism, we already live the identical life he

lives in heaven, but this spiritual life is not manifest nor as glorious as it will be at the second coming. We live in glory, but it is not yet actualized in our mortal bodies because we live in finite time, in a world that offers both good and evil. Our glory has already been accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but it is not actualized, that is, not plainly visible in our lives yet. It is only in the second coming, the parousia, when our bodies will rejoin our immortal souls and we will live forever as new creations that our glory will be complete, yet even now, we live in glory through Jesus Christ. Oh yes, we are Easter people; we are the people of the promise.

Easter season is a time of hope. Easter season is the time to celebrate our new creation in Christ: even though other things remain the same; even though we still suffer pain; even though we still encounter hardship; even though tears still become mixed with laughter and joy with sorrow; even though there are times that we revel in God's love and times that we sin, yet there is hope! Our sins nailed Jesus to the cross, yet through that very cross we have become victorious over sin through the grace of Jesus Christ. Sin no longer has power over us. From nastiness to grace we have been saved through the cross of Jesus Christ. That cross now has become our banner of victory.

Just like the disciples encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus, he walks with us. The resurrected Christ walks with you and me and continues to explain to us the

Holy Scriptures. He continues to reveal himself to us so that we may know the Father through him, and the great love that he has for us. Yes, brothers and sisters, we are Easter people. Alleluia! Christ is risen. Amen.

Father Al Jewson

¹ New Revised Standard Version, Colossians 3: 2-4

² Ibid, 2:12