

Your response is ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

You remember the official Catholic, Latin greeting for Easter? Resurrexit sicut dixit! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! He is risen as He said! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

OK, you remember the tradition of the RISUS PASCHALIS? The PASCHAL or EASTER joke? It came about because the greatest joke of all times was played on the devil. He thought that he had won on Good Friday. But the joke was on him. God won with the resurrection on Easter Sunday. A few facts about the Coronavirus:

--half of us are going to come out of this quarantine as amazing cooks. The other half will come out with a drinking problem.

--remember how we used to spin that toilet paper like we were on WHEEL OF FORTUNE? Now we turn it like we're cracking a safe.

--we need to practice social distancing – from our refrigerators!

--So where did you decide to go for Easter – the Living Room or the TV room?

--A Public Service Announcement: Every few days try on your jeans – just to make sure they still fit – pajamas will have us believe all is well in the kingdom.

--One woman writes that Homeschooling seems to be going well. Just 2 students were suspended for fighting and 1 teacher fired for drinking on the job.

--I don't think any of us expected that when we changed the clocks we'd go from Standard Time to the Twilight Zone.

--Quarantine Day 5: A lady writes that she went to a restaurant called THE KITCHEN. You have to gather all the ingredients and make your own meal. She has no clue how this place is still in business.

--Day 5 of Homeschooling: One of the little monsters called in a bomb threat.

--nowadays we get excited when it's time to take out the garbage – what should I wear?

--I saw a classified Ad in the Newspaper: Single man with toilet paper seeks woman with hand sanitizer for good clean fun.

--A father told me on Day 6 of Homeschooling: His child just said "I hope I don't have the same teacher next year" He was so offended.

But remember – better 6 feet apart than 6 feet under! OK, enough nonsense.

Philosopher George Santayana inherited a substantial sum and decided to resign his teaching post. In the midst of his final, crowded lecture at Harvard, he glanced out the window and saw a forsythia bush

beginning to bloom in the muddy snow. He stopped, picked up his hat and coat, and headed for the door -- where he stopped and explained to his stunned students: "I won't be able to finish that sentence, I have an appointment with April." He had a new priority. We have an appointment with Easter -- and we have been given a new priority. Three moments to my madness, 3 points for you to ponder. First, what is life? Second, what is an Easter life? And third, what does Easter life LOOK like?

First, life. It is said that a person needs just these things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for. (Tom Bodett) We HAVE those things -- in our faith in Jesus Christ, the One who has conquered sin and death and brought us salvation. After THAT, what more do we need -- or even want? Even as we 'shelter in place' we have the presence of the risen Christ always with us.

For far too many, life is a pocket full of regrets, 'if only's,' and 'I should haves.' Many people could be summed up like this: "First I was dying to finish high school and start college. And then I was dying to finish college and start working. And then I was dying to marry and have children. And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for school so I could return to work. And then I was dying to retire. And now, I am dying....and suddenly, I realize I forgot to live. (Anonymous)

The reality is that we no longer live in the landscape of wonder that inhabited the lives of so many pre-modern people. If we are typically modern, we live in ennui; we are bored, jaded, cynical, flat, and burnt out. When the skies roll back like a scroll and the angelic trumpet sounds, many will simply yawn and say, "Pretty good special effects, but the plot's too traditional." If we were not so bored and empty, we would not have to stimulate ourselves with increasing doses of sex and violence and stuff -- or just constant busyness. For many of us it's taken a pandemic for us to wake up and realize that there is a better way to live. We live in the most fantastic fun and games factory ever invented -- the computer age -- and we are often bored, like a spoiled rich kid in a mansion surrounded by a thousand expensive toys. Medieval people by comparison were like peasants in toyless hovels -- and they were fascinated. Occasions for awe and wonder seemed to abound: birth and death and love and light and darkness and wind and sea and fire and sunrise and star and tree and bird and human mind -- and God and Heaven. All these things have not changed, but we have. The universe has not become empty and we full; it has remained full and we have become empty, insensitive to its fullness, cold hearted. (Peter Kreeft, EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HEAVEN, p. 20-21)

Erma Bombeck wrote this piece entitled: IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER: "I would have talked less and listened more. I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded. I would have eaten the popcorn in the living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace. I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth. I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a spring day because my hair had just been done. I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in the attic. I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains. I would have cried and laughed less while watching television -- and more while watching life. I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband. I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day. I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show dirt, or was guaranteed for life.

"Instead of wishing away 9 months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle. When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, "Later. Now go wash your hands for dinner." There would have been more "I love you's"....more "I'm sorry's"....but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute....look at it and really see it -- live it....and never give it back.

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Second, what is an EASTER life? What difference does it make that we believe in the resurrected Christ? What difference does it make that we believe that WE will be resurrected one day? One author talks about the problem with WOOFING. You know, all the negative, naysayers, the downers who always have an objection to whatever is going on. He says that this WOOFING bemuddles so much of life. "To know and to serve God," he writes, "is of course why we are here, a clear truth that, like the nose on your face, is near at hand and easily discernible but can make you dizzy if you try to focus on it hard. But a little faith will see you through. When the country goes to the dogs, cats must learn to be circumspect....and have faith that all this woofing is not the last word. What is the last word then? Gentleness is everywhere in daily life, a sign that faith rules through ordinary things: through cooking and small talk, (social distancing but still being friendly), through storytelling, making love, fishing, tending animals and sweet corn and flowers, through sports, music and books, raising kids, keeping in touch and looking out for our elderly friends, relatives and neighbors – all the places where the grace soaks in and grace shines through. ("On the Meaning of Life," in WE ARE STILL MARRIED, Garrison Keillor, p. 71)

How do we get that kind of life, that resurrection perspective? Well, right now, it seems to be thrust upon us! We have more time for what we so desperately need – for prayer. Because we usually move too fast, for too long, about far too little, we often end up pursuing someone else's dream of success and happiness and miss our own. We trade eternal life for a bigger house – or a house at the beach. We miss love and friendship because we are too busy looking for our next promotion. Doesn't all of that look so different now than it did just 2 months ago?

A prayer might help: "Slow me down, Lord. Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind. Steady my hurried pace with the vision of the eternal reach of time. Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations...of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to read a few lines from a good book. Let me look upward into the branches of the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well. Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life's enduring values." This could actually be the great gift of living in time of a pandemic.

Finally, what would an Easter life LOOK like? St. Augustine put it this way: "It is not a great thing to live long, nor even to live forever, but it is a great thing to live well." A piece of graffiti on a New York subway expressed the idea: You can pinch my lips so I can't blow my horn, but my fingers will find a piano. You can slam the piano lid on my fingers, but you can't stop my toes from tapping like a drum. You can stomp on my feet to keep my toes from tapping, but my heart will keep swinging in 4/4/ time. You can even stop my heart from ticking but the music of the saints shall never cease. (William G. Carter, "Singing a New Song: The Gospel and Jazz," THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN, xix, #1 (1998, p. 46) Now THAT person KNEW resurrection life – FROM THE INSIDE!

But it's not a particularly complicated thing. It's not out of our reach. It's not impossible for anyone of us tuning in to this empty church with a small group of people with very full hearts. WHY? Because it DOESN'T come from us. It comes from God. God who raised up Jesus and sent the women scurrying to share the good news, raises us up in baptism and sends us scurrying to share that same good news.

A few years ago a nationwide poll asked, "What word or phrase would you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?"

GUESS!

Of course! “I LOVE YOU” was the FIRST thing that people wanted to hear.

Second? “You are forgiven.” Number 3, believe it or not, was “Supper is ready.” All of these are possible for us – even in a COVID 19 age. Maybe ESPECIALLY in COVID 19 age. To say TO others, and to recognize that GOD is constantly saying them TO US. “I LOVE YOU” is God’s unconditional promise that is made manifest in the resurrection, celebrated at Easter, and remembered every time we gather for the Eucharist. “YOU ARE FORGIVEN” is God’s undeserved and unmerited and unconditional grace poured forever upon us. It’s there even BEFORE we ask for it. And “Supper is ready” is God’s invitation to feast at His banquet that we hear every time we gather for the Lord’s Supper. “Happy are those who are called to the Supper of the Lamb.” Easter life surrounds us – but do we even recognize it?

But Easter life is being lived all around us – by people we know and love right here in our parish. Look at those who work with BROWN BAG ministry, Catholic Social Ministries, Western Wake Crisis Ministry, HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, people who volunteer anywhere, anytime, those who coach kids, are scout masters, cook for funeral luncheons, serving on committees and praying for all that it may be done for God’s glory and His kingdom. Easter life is there in every doctor, nurse, technician, housekeeper in the hospitals risking their lives to care for those stricken by the virus. There is so much Easter life here that it literally is busting out and spilling over Wake County. But don’t wait. As my mother always said, “It’s later than you think.” It reminds me of the doctor who telephoned his patient, “Joe,” he said, “I have the reports from your tests. I need you to come to my office immediately.” In less than 30 minutes, Joe was in the doctor’s office. “Joe,” said the doctor, “I’ve got bad news and worse news. The bad news is that you are going to live only 24 hours....” Joe interrupted: “Doctor, that’s terrible news! Awful! What could be possible worse than that?” TO which the doctor replied, “I tried to call you yesterday.” GOD HAS BEEN TRYING TO CALL US SINCE THE DAY WE WERE BORN! Does it take a pandemic to finally get our attention?

SO – I suggest that we make a decision – TODAY – to live AS THOUGH EASTER HAS ALREADY OCCURRED TO US – because it has! Decide that we will be cheerful in pain, optimistic in difficulties and pandemic, generous in our donations of time, talent and treasure. Recognize that the Easter life that we have been given is a gift that is to be used for the sake of others. AND THEN HAVE FUN! The world needs people who laugh and help everyone else laugh. We don’t have to look like we swallowed a pickle to be holy! The saints were full of life – and laughter – and fun. READ THEIR BIOGRAPHIES! They are REAL characters.

And once you have made your decision to live an Easter life, we might want to remember this:

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on her tombstone from the beginning to end.

He noted that first came the date of birth, and he spoke of the last date with tears, but he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time that she spent alive on earth...And now only those who love her know what that line is worth.

For it matters not how much we own: the cars...the house...the cash....What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard....Are there things you’d like to change? For you never know how much time is left. (You could be at ‘dash mid-range.’)

If we could just slow down enough to consider what's true and real, and always try to understand the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more and love the people in our lives, like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect, and more often wear a smile...Remembering that this special dash might only last a while.

So, when your eulogy has been read with your life's actions to rehash...Would you be proud of things they say about how you spent your dash? (HOTMAIL from Major Charles Thomas, Wed, Jan 20, 1999) St. Andrew's parish: You have made MY life abundantly rich these last 2 years by the way that you live out this Easter mystery. I hope that one day I will live it as well as you. And I LONG for the day when we will be back at church together. Thank you for tuning in! NEVER SURRENDER HOPE! CHRIST WILL TRIUMPH OVER ANY VIRUS!

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HE IS RISEN AS HE SAID: ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!