

OK, your RISUS PASCHALIS is from a piece by that Supermom of the News Syndicate, Erma Bombeck. She writes:

A lot of things have been done in bed in the name of love....but nothing comes close to the traditional Mother's Day breakfast in bed.

On this day, all over the country, mothers are pushed back into their pillows, their bird of paradise (which blooms every other year for 15 minutes) is snipped and put in a shot glass, and a strange assortment of food comes out of a kitchen destined to take the sight out of a good eye.

A mixer whirs out of control, then stops abruptly as a voice cries "I'm telling!"

A dog barks and another voice says, "Get his paws out of there – Mom has to eat that!"

Minutes pass and finally, "Dad – where's the chili sauce?" Then, "Don't you dare bleed on Mom's breakfast!"

The rest is a blur of banging doors, running water, rapid footsteps and finally, "YOU started the fire; YOU put it out!"

The breakfast is fairly standard: a water tumbler of juice, 5 pieces of black bacon that snaps in half when you breathe on them, a mound of eggs that would feed a Marine division, and 4 pieces of ice-cold toast. They line up on the bed to watch you eat and from time to time ask why you're not drinking your Kool-Aid or touching the cantaloupe with black olives on top spelling out M-O-M.

Later that night, after you have decided that it's easier to move to a new house than clean the kitchen, you return to your bed, where you encounter beneath the blanket either: a) a black jelly bean, b) a planter's wart, or c) a black olive that put the O in M-O-M.

And if you're wise, you'll reflect on this day. For the first time, your children gave instead of received. They offered up to you the sincerest form of flattery – trying to emulate what you would do for them. They gave you one of the greatest gifts people can give: themselves. (From MOTHERHOOD....p. 143-144) HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY TO ALL OF YOU KNOW THAT PRIVILEGE! We'll have a special blessing for you at the end of the mass. I hope your breakfast in bed goes well and you don't have to move!

First a little bit of background on the imagery Jesus uses in today's gospel. The setting for this text is the Last Supper. This gospel is part of the 'Farewell Discourse' of Jesus, which stretches from the beginning of Chapter 13 to the end of Chapter 17, and includes the washing of the disciples' feet. And we see in this passage the tender love that Christ has for us – it is the night of His betrayal, the night before He is crucified, and He is trying to comfort and reassure His disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." The next part – "Have FAITH in God and FAITH in me" would be better translated as "TRUST in God; TRUST also in me." The Greek word used here carries connotations more engaging and relational than the rather abstract and detached 'have faith.'

And Thomas and Philip openly express their unease with Jesus' declarations that they know the way He is going. Thomas candidly blurts out, "We don't know" (v. 5). "Though the others may act like they know the

path you are on, I don't know, and I'll admit it." Thomas probably sensed that things weren't going to go well. He and Philip express confusion and ignorance about where Jesus is going and what the Father looks like. (help from Willimon, PULPIT RESOURCE, April-June 2020, p. 19)

And Jesus reassures us that He is going to prepare a place for us. The folks who heard this would have understood the background to it. In ancient Middle Eastern culture, extended families often lived together in the same house. So when a young couple was betrothed to be married, the bridegroom would go back to his father's house and build on some extra rooms for he and his new bride. Once the building project was complete, he would come to claim his bride and take her back to the newly-expanded house. The wedding would take place only after the bridegroom had completed the building project and prepared a new home for his bride.

When Jesus says that He is going to His Father's house to prepare a place for us, He is talking like a bridegroom to His beloved. And this bridegroom deeply loves us – He is preparing MANY rooms in His Father's house. He is making a promise to return for us and bring us to our new home – eternal life with God. Only He can make this promise because He is, as He told His disciples, the only way to God. (adapted from DYNAMIC PREACHING, April-June 2020, p. 38) Remember, in scripture, Christ is the bridegroom and we are His beloved spouse, the church.

Second, this becomes such a wonderful image for us in our COVID weary lives. Right now, a lot of us feel kind of displaced, out of place, or perhaps our place is fractured by job loss, isolation, seemingly endless bad news. When we lose a sense of place, we don't do well.

Think about every time you have had to move in life. It's a very difficult time when we move. We lose our home. We feel confused. Everything familiar is lost; everything new is strange, foreign, different. None of us ever imagined that modern American life would be anything like it is at present. And there's a lot of tension. Families are struggling because they are TOGETHER 24 hours a day. Single people are struggling because they are ALONE 24 hours a day. It's a big whoop these days just to go to the grocery store – and we don't even feel comfortable doing that with our masks and sanitizer and wipes. And where in the world is the toilet paper!

And so my third point – Even into this currently rather weary world, yet again, comes the God-who-comes, our Emmanuel – God-with-us. Once again with words of assurance and hope and tenderness. "I haven't forgotten you, anymore than I was neglecting my disciples on the night before I died on the cross. No, I'm right here. I'm with you. Beside you. Going before you to prepare a place for you. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

We have One who creates a home for us, who IS home for us. Frederick Buechner wrote a beautiful book called LONGING FOR HOME. In it are the words: "No matter how much the world shatters us to pieces, we carry inside us a VISION of the wholeness that we sense is our true home and that beckons to us."

That's what this gospel gives us – the vision of our true home. This gospel is perfect for us today. Jesus learned as He grew and matured that His home was not Nazareth, where He grew up, it was not even with His 12 hand-picked friends, even though they had left their own places and slept under the stars with Him – He always reminded them: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." (Lk 9:58). They were feeling disoriented, dislocated, unsure. Jesus assured them. And He assures us. There's a bigger vision. GOD's vision. Heaven. The new and eternal Jerusalem.

Trust me, Jesus reminds us. I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. I know many of us are longing for home AS WE USED TO KNOW IT. CHURCH AS WE USED TO KNOW IT. SHOPPING, INTERACTING, TRAVELING as we used to know it. But when we reflect on our Catholic tradition, we realize that out of place is a rather natural state for us as disciples of Christ. This pandemic has forced all of us to look at our lives again. Some simply refuse to do so. But if we are reflecting and praying at all – we can see that this pandemic might not be such a terrible thing to be experiencing after all. We’ve often said that American culture is kind of whacky. Kind of shallow. Overly attached to stuff. “Be not anxious over how you are to dress or what you are to eat – behold the lilies of the field and the birds of the sky....your heavenly Father takes care of them...”

When we lose our job, lose our health, all of a sudden things look very differently. Suddenly stuff is not very important. Jesus spent much of His ministry telling us not to allow ourselves to become too settled. “Unless you are willing to leave father and mother, jobs and place, unless you are able to put your hand to the plow and not look back, you cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 18:29, 9:62, paraphrased). What Jesus means is that we cannot find our place in the future with Him – the only place that is lasting and worth settling down in – unless we let go of the death grip that other places/things have on us in this world.

All of life is a journey. This is the very nature of life. We can try to deny it, we can fight it, but sooner or later, we are going to have to accept it. The tidal wave of change is the nature of the day, and only if we get on the surfboard and ride it out will we know the true thrill of it all.

The Catholic tradition has taught this from the very beginning. This is from the early second century Epistle of Mathetius to Diognetus: “As citizens, Christians share all things with others, and yet endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers....They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.” Isn’t that a wonderful quote to keep in mind as we move through this jarring time?

Ultimately our deep need for settledness, for safety, for security and assurance will only be met in heaven. HEAVEN IS OUR PLACE. GOD IS OUR PLACE.

Yes, we have our ‘little’ places that make us feel at home and ok. And they are good, but they are limited. A pandemic reminds us just how limited they are – and forces us to reevaluate our over-attachment to them.

We are ‘a place’ for our families and all we love. We are ‘a place’ for those who depend upon us for nurture and shelter. We are ‘a place’ for our friends and coworkers. We are place for one another throughout life, until we find our true and final place. This pandemic keeps reminding us to refocus on eternal realities – and to let some of our attachments go.

One of the powerful names for God in the Jewish rabbinic tradition is, curiously enough, THE PLACE. God is our place. God is our destination. Our Place in the end is really a relationship. We are not talking about a house of the Lord so much as a home with the Lord. There alone we will be at rest. Until then, we pray with St. Augustine, “Our hearts are made for you O God, and they are restless. And they will not rest until they find their rest in you.” (help from George A. Mason, “Until We Find a Place” in BEST SERMONS, vol 8, p. 75-81) AMEN.