

RESURREXIT SICUT DIXIT! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! HE IS RISEN AS HE SAID! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

OK, your RISUS PASCHALIS, or Easter joke. A tradition that comes from the fact that God played the greatest joke of all time on the devil at Easter. On Good Friday, the devil thought he had won, but Easter Sunday turned the joke on the devil in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

SO, do you remember, before the internet, that people thought the cause of stupidity was the lack of access to information? Well, now we know it wasn't that!

I agree with the suggestion that it's time to take the warning labels off everything -- and let stupidity work itself out of the gene pool.

I also now realize that when older people say, "Enjoy them while they are young." They are talking about their knees and hips – not your kids!

OK, down to business. First, most of us probably grew up thinking that the Resurrection was a one-time miracle about Jesus, something that proved He was God. And while that's true, there is far more to it. Jesus is actually *naming and revealing what is happening everywhere and all the time* in God. Jesus' resurrection is a statement about how reality works: always moving toward resurrection, toward fullness, toward God. As our Catholic funeral preface says, "Life is changed, not ended." This is the divine mystery of transformation, which is also evident in the physical universe. This is why we believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus, even if it is a new kind of physicality, which Paul struggles to describe in 1 Cor. 15:35ff.

Resurrection is both a miracle and an enduring relationship. The best way to speak about the Resurrection is not to say, "Jesus rose from the dead" as if it was a self-generated miracle – but to say, "Jesus was raised from the dead" (as many early texts state). The Eternal Christ is thus revealed as the map, the blueprint, the promise, the pledge, the guarantee of what is happening everywhere, all summed up in one person so we can see it modeled for us. With the resurrection, we know where we are headed.

If we can understand Jesus as the archetype of true humanity, the model for everybody and everything, we will get much closer to the Gospel's message. This is why Jesus usually called Himself 'The Son of Man.' His resurrection is not so much a miracle that we can argue about, believe, or disbelieve, but an invitation to look deeper at what is always happening in the life process itself. Jesus, or any member of the 'Body of Christ,' cannot really die because we are participating in something eternal – the Cosmic Christ that came forth from God. When God breathed His Spirit into us, we became part of God, we became eternal! We believe not only in the resurrection of our bodies – but the forever existence of our souls!

Second, this means that death is not just physical dying, but going to the full depth of things, hitting the bottom, beyond where we are in control. And in that sense, we all go through many deaths in our lifetime. These deaths to the small self are tipping points, opportunities to allow ourselves to be transformed. Unfortunately it seems that most of the time people simply turn bitter and look for someone to blame. So their death is indeed death for them, because they close down to growth and new life.

But if we do choose to walk through the depths – even the depths of our own sin and mistakes – we will come out the other side, knowing we've been taken there by a Source larger than ourselves. Surely this is what it means to be saved. Being saved doesn't mean that we are any better than anyone else. It means we've allowed and accepted the mystery of transformation, which is always pure gift.

If we are to speak of miracles, the most miraculous thing of all is that God uses the very thing that would normally destroy us – the tragic, the sorrowful, the painful, the unjust – to transform and enlighten us. Now we are indestructible and there are no absolute dead ends. This is what we mean when we say we are ‘saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus.’ This is not a cosmic transaction, but a human transformation to a much higher level of love and consciousness. We have been plucked from the flames of any would-be death to the soul, and we have become a very different kind of human being in this world. Jesus is indeed saving the world. Jesus is truly risen! (freely adapted from Richard Rohr, posting of 5 July 2015)

Third, we spend our lives wrestling with life! With the questions of life without end. We wonder if there is really any such thing. And then we decide that there must be. Surely everything we see around us – all this energy, all this good, all this joy – has not been for nothing. Surely our lives have some kind of eternal meaning. Otherwise why do we even exist?

Our faith tells us that there is always another way to look at life. There is an Easter side to everything.

For example, around the world people who had nothing to do with starting a war are dying in it. Whole peoples are underfed, overworked, and underpaid, condemned to conditions they cannot change. So where is life in that? What kind of life is that? And what is there to be thankful for if all the dimensions of life are all so fragile, so fleeting? If love is temporary and not as lasting as we hope for, is it foolish to love? If growth and achievement are simply natural stages in every life, why work so hard to get them? If life is nothing but drudgery, why bother?

The truth is that all these elements – good and bad, painful as well as pleasant – are the alleluia points of life. Once love comes, once we recognize the great love that is behind it all, the resurrection pattern behind it all, alleluia becomes a descant of every day. Once we come to know the love that brought us into being, the love that sustains every breath we take; once we come to know our own abilities, we are able to give thanks for everything. Even the tough stuff can be joyful, can be fulfilling, there is nothing that can be asked of us that is too much to do if we want to do it. All these things are simply part of the process of living an alleluia life. And all of that living – always in the context of this great love -- is what makes us who and what we are.

What’s more, the challenges of life give us all a chance over and over again to do today what we did not do last year or in another place or yesterday. Life, however interrupted, is one long moment of coming to be the best we can be. Life, we come to understand, is simply the process of growing into God. Or as St. Paul puts it: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” THAT’S an Easter life, an alleluia life!

A story that exemplifies this Easter life, this alleluia life. On November 18, 1995, Itzhak Perlman, the famous violinist, came on stage to give a concert at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. Just getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with polio as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of 2 crutches. To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is a sight. He walks painfully, yet majestically, until he reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and proceeds to play. Audiences are used to this ritual. They sit quietly while he makes his way across the stage to his chair. They remain reverently silent while he undoes the clasps on his legs. They wait until he is ready to play.

But this time, something went wrong. Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap – it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what

that sound meant. There was no mistaking what he had to do. People who were there that night thought to themselves: “We figured that he would have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage – to either find another violin or else find another string for this one.”

But he didn't. Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra began, and he played from where he had left off. And he played with such passion and such power and such purity as they had never heard before. Of course, anyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just 3 strings. Greg knows that, and you know that, but that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that. You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was de-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. There was an extraordinary outburst of applause. The audience was all on their feet, screaming and cheering, doing everything they could to show how much they appreciated what he had done. He smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet them, and then he said, not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone, “You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

That's truly an Easter line! It has stayed in my mind ever since I read of this occurrence. “Our task is to find out how much music we can still make with what we have left.” Isn't this the way of life – not just for artists, but for all of us as followers of Christ? Here is a man who has prepared all his life to make music on a violin of 4 strings, who, all of a sudden, in the middle of a concert, finds himself with only 3 strings. So he makes music with 3 strings, and the music he made that night with just 3 strings was more beautiful, more sacred, more memorable, than any that he had ever made before, when he had 4 strings. So, perhaps our task in this shaky, fast-changing, bewildering world in which we live is to make music, to sing our alleluias, at first with all that we have, and then, when that is no longer possible, to make music and to sing alleluia with what we have left. Amen! (Resurrexit Sicut Dixit! Alleluia! Alleluia! He is risen as He said! Alleluia! Alleluia!) (Story from the Houston Chronicle by Jack Riemer)