

OK, your Risus Paschalis, or Easter joke.

It is said that a quiet man is a thinking man. But a quiet woman is usually mad.

The other day, I found \$20 in the Harris-Teeter Parking Lot. I thought to myself WWJD? 'What would Jesus do?' So I turned it into wine! CHEERS!

OK, I found some fascinating stuff on this gospel. What's the deal with the 'baked or broiled fish' that Jesus requests to eat? Of course, partly this is a piece of fish to help prove that He's a human being with digestion and substance, but the fish is also a messianic symbol that heralds a new age and an important message about the mission that comes with Easter.

Now the Hebrew word for fish (dag) represents the number 7, the number of perfection. The fish are also blessed in Genesis and told to be 'fruitful and multiply and fill the seas.' The feast of the righteous in the end times will include the meat of Leviathan – remember the great sea creature of Genesis? – The Jewish midrash told that in the end time, Leviathan, who is part of the chaos of the sea, will be slain by God to nourish believers at the coming of the Messiah. For this reason, many Jews add a piece of fish to the seder plate when celebrating Passover; it's a sign of the Messianic age to come; it's an allusion in John's Chapter 6, THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE, when the young boy presents bread and FISH for Jesus to multiply in the story of the loaves and fishes. As Catholics, we believe this messianic age has already begun in Christ. We pray in the Lord's prayer, THY KINGDOM COME ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. We also access the divine mysteries through food – especially through the Eucharist. The Jews did so through the manna, the bread from heaven. Just as the sabbath meal is a glimpse of the world to come, Jesus uses food as a symbol not only of His death and sacrifice, but also as a glimpse to the fulfillment of God's divine redemption for the world and all within it. We see a foretaste of this in Jesus' feeding of the multitudes, His references to Jonah, and to fishing and mission. The messianic clue culminates with the sharing of fish during this post-resurrection appearance.

The death of Leviathan symbolizes the death of sin and the world as we know it. Someday, in its place will rise a new world, different from the last, but redeemed and beautiful.

As Jesus eats fish with His disciples, He is announcing that sin and death and this world will pass away, but that a new one will come to pass. Jesus is beginning this new world with His resurrection – the messianic age has begun. And we have a role to play in God's continuing mission, WE become FISHERS of men and women. That's a lot of theology in one little piece of baked fish! (all of this taken and adapted from JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES, "The Feast of Leviathan" by Lori Wagner, SERMONS.COM, p. 2 & 3)

OK, so what? What difference does it make whether we believe in the resurrection or not? A messianic age or not? The reality is that professing our belief in the resurrection and the life of the world to come is the only path through the reality of sin and death. We live in a world marred by too many mass shootings to count, war in Ukraine and the Mideast, violence in Haiti, a rapidly worsening climate crisis, increasing economic inequality, ongoing racist violence, and a second global pandemic of mental illness and anguish.

In the face of all this, we need to know that a better world is not just possible but assured. We need to trust that God's salvation encompasses not only those of us who enjoy fairly comfortable lives here on earth -- but also those who do not experience the saving love, healing, and justice of God in this life. In other words, we believe in heaven because we believe in God's salvation for the children who have died by abortion and in

elementary school classrooms because our culture worships guns. For God's salvation for the millions around the world who died of the coronavirus before vaccines were developed. For Black, Brown, Indigenous, gay and transgender Americans who live in perpetual fear of violence and recrimination. For the young people who live under the shadow of mental illnesses that modern medicine can't yet alleviate. For casualties of war around the world. For people in chronic pain.

For all these people, we need to know that, while we have every obligation to alleviate suffering in this world, and do all the good we can, the salvation of God's children does not, finally, depend upon our clumsy and faltering efforts.

If we lost our belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we will also lose the ferocity of our hope, the holy restlessness that leads us to action, the commitment to justice that fuels our prophetic lament, solidarity, resilience, and courage. After all, how will we pray for God's kingdom to come, and how will we credibly usher in that kingdom in whatever small ways we can here and now, if we don't believe in its ultimate fulfillment?

If the resurrection really is the best good news that has ever hit the planet – and it is! – then its goodness does not depend on us. The tomb is empty. Death – and Leviathan – are vanquished. Jesus lives. Period. We are not in charge of Easter; God is.

There is a clue to this in Jesus' own resurrected body. It is still wounded, even after the resurrection. Even in the most triumphant story ever told in Scripture or history, Jesus' scars remain. Resurrection is a way forward from the grave that honors the scars we carry, our world carries, helping us to bear them with resilience and hope. (adapted from Debie Thomas, in "Resurrection Fuels Hopeful Action", CAC Meditation of 2 April, 2024)

Third, so what are we to DO? That is for each one of us to decide, but we are SUPPOSED TO DO SOMETHING! Not just come to church! There is a mission that Easter requires of every one of us. We need to be involved in something that is about the work of trying to bind up the wounds of our world. Brown Bag Ministry, Western Wake Crisis Ministry, any Pro-Life activity, any service to the poor, being a Foster parent, BIG BROTHER, whatever! There is a place and a task for all of us – no matter how big or small. And so I close with a story of one, tiny but very real ministry of bringing Easter into our world.

Many parishes have a knitting ministry or shawl-making ministry – groups of knitters who create shawls for those who need them most. St. Andrew's has a very dedicated group, headed by Arlene Lord. It's a group that gets together to knit, and a prayer is 'stitched' into every strand of the quilts, blankets and shawls that they make. These knitters bring to life the ancient Celtic ideal of weaving as a simple spiritual practice of contributing our work to God's work of creation. Those who receive their handiwork find themselves wrapped in beauty, peace, and care.

Susan Jorgensen and Susan Iazard write about the shawl-knitting ministry in their book *KNITTING INTO THE MYSTERY*. For these women and their sister and brother knitters, "our hands are God's hands."

They write: "What is it you receive when you receive a shawl? You receive a garment that proclaims peace – peace over you, peace under you, peace within you, peace around you....You receive a shawl that has been knit in love – love that is freely given for its own sake. I don't know of a soul who knits shawls for material gain or recognition. The people I know who knit, are passionate about loving, and seek only to express that love through their craft. You receive a garment that has been filled with healing intentions and

comfort, a garment that seeks to console and give solace, a garment that celebrates and affirms, a garment that showers abundant blessings upon its wearer from the compassionate heart of its knitter.

“What is it that you receive when you receive a shawl? You receive membership into a circle that has no boundaries, a circle with a momentum that continues to ripple out into the global community. The sum of it has become far greater than any of the people and parts that have played its midwives.

”In a time when war is destroying what we hold dear and the world is in chaos, you receive peace that you may be peace. You receive love that you may be love. You receive healing that you may heal. You receive affirmation that you may affirm....

The women continue: “Human beings love being wrapped – be it a child wrapped and swaddled or an adult curled up on the couch. The activity touches a deep chord within. I sit at my computer composing this chapter, wrapped in a luxurious, deep purple shawl that is a combination of sheep and llama wool.....As I pull it around me tight, I am continually amazed by the ability of this garment to yield to the shape of my body. I feel safe; I feel held; I feel loved. I believe 2 things are happening here: a very primitive and early need is being touched and satisfied, and the prayer of another is seeping into the fiber of my being.”

This is one example of our Easter mission; we all have to claim our own. But let it be taken from the image of peace with which the Risen Lord blesses in today’s Gospel: peace that heals and lifts up, peace that is not just the passive absence of conflict but the active pursuit of justice and mercy for all. The peace and reconciliation envisioned by Christ has been entrusted over to His first ‘witnesses.’ Now that work has been passed on to us. In our struggles to live Jesus’ Gospel of compassion, forgiveness and justice in the simplicity of our everyday lives, we ‘weave’ into the fabric of our time and place the peace and justice that is the very embrace of God for all His beloved daughters and sons. Amen. (story adapted from CONNECTIONS, 14 April 2024, p. 2-3)