

Easter Sunday  
March 31, 2024

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## Easter 2024

For centuries the egg has been a symbol of Easter. For some of us, our earliest memories include coloring eggs on Easter Saturday with great anticipation for the celebration of Easter.

Let's look a little closer at this symbol and what the egg may tell us about what Easter is really all about.

A small chick begins the long journey to birth. A not-yet-bird weighs little more than air; its beak and claws are barely pinpricks. The bird-to-be is in its own little world, protected by the rigid shell, warmed by the mother hen's body and nourished by the nutrients within the egg's membrane.

But eventually the chick begins the work of life — over several days, the chick keeps picking and picking until it breaks out of its narrow world and into an amazing wider one.

But for this to happen the egg needs to fall to pieces. New life demands a shattering of the old.

On this Easter, we celebrate with the Church throughout the world, the whole Christian community – joining with Mary Magdalene and the other apostles – that Jesus broke through the egg; the stone was rolled away; Jesus is risen from the dead and the old way of darkness and sin, violence and greed, have crumbled to pieces. A new day has begun – a new world being birthed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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But sisters and brothers, what is so crucial about our Easter faith, is that we are called *not only* to believe that Christ – 2000 years ago – rose from the dead, thereby proving he was God; but Easter is our annual reminder that, *through our baptism ... the baptism the nine candidates in our Parish are receiving this Easter... and in our day to day lives*, we as individuals, we in relationship, we in family, we in church and community, we in our world *are all called to experience the resurrection in our own time and in our own lives!* And: we do that simply as the Master taught us: *we experience the resurrection in the power of love.*

Christ lives within us and among us when we love one another!

The risen Christ lives in us and among us as together we build the kingdom, the world God intended. This is the timeless message of all Christians, not only on Easter Sunday but on every day of the year. The resurrection of Jesus is not primarily a doctrine we try to prove or problem we argue about. It is the life and action of Christ within and among us through the work of the Holy Spirit. The very Spirit conferred on our Pauline Maebly in the Sacrament of Confirmation this Easter.

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Brothers and sisters, this all sounds wonderful, doesn't it? ... Until we go home and pick up the Post-Standard or the New York Times or turn on the TV News... . If we're honest, sometimes it seems more like Jesus is still in the tomb. We're living in a pretty scary time: over 40 wars being fought; genocide in Gaza; violence on our streets; Mother Earth dying. Pope Francis talks about "World War II three being fought in parts" ... in Ukraine, Congo, Sudan and elsewhere. Sisters and brothers fleeing from their homes for safety and met with rejection and even hatred at the borders. Racism, sexism homophobia, trans phobia, all the "isms;" ... the deepening crisis of democracy and truth and integrity in our own nation and around the world... and the list goes on.

Where is the new world that the risen Christ has been birthing for 2000 years???!

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Well, if we're honest, the world *would be a lot worse off* if there were no Christian sisters and brothers joining with other people of good will doing amazing works of mercy locally and globally. The world would be a lot worse off without Christian brothers and sisters joining with other people of good will in working to change the systems and structures that are at the root of our local and global suffering and inequality, our global evil.

But *if we're honest*, for a significant portion of the 1700 years of Christendom in many ways, we pushed Jesus and his mission *back into the tomb* and *made Jesus into our image and likeness*. The Christian religion, instead of being a 'finger-pointing to God,' has become a God...

The late author and monk, Thomas Merton describes it this way:

"Though we may still say, with our lips, that 'Christ is risen,' we secretly – in practice – behave as if he were dead, and we act like there is a massive stone blocking the way and keeping us from getting to his dead body. Our Christian religion too often becomes simply the cult of the dead body of Christ."

Merton goes on to say, this is what actually happens to the Christian religion when it ceases to be a really living faith and becomes a mere legalistic and ritualistic formality. Such Christianity no longer has life in the risen Christ but a formal cult of the dead Christ.

The bottom-line Merton writes, is that “we must never let our religious ideas, customs, rituals, and conventions become more real to us than the risen Christ.” The Church rather than being a light to the world, becomes assimilated by the world, and in some ways, we may say, it’s not that Christianity doesn’t work...; but it’s never really been tried.

An example from today’s resurrection Gospel: Mary Magdalene is the premier woman of the resurrection Gospels. All four Gospels explicitly point out that Mary Magdalene was present at the tomb on Easter morning, and – in John’s account – *she is the first person to encounter, be commissioned by and proclaim the risen Christ*. For the earliest Christians, telling the Easter story without including the witness of Mary Magdalene, was impossible! As we know, Jesus of the Gospel crossed many religious and cultural norms... which is why he ended up on the cross... including having Mary Magdalene and others as part of his ‘pastoral team.’ But it wasn’t long before patriarchy seeped into the early Community and by the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, authority in the church became primarily male and to this day women are in second place, or *no place* when it comes to authority in the Church.

So: what was this patriarchal church going to do with Mary Magdalene?! Well they did what many of those in power do — they *discredited* her... making up the story that has been retold for centuries that Mary Magdalene was a contrite prostitute who, after encountering Jesus, spent the rest of her life in private prayer and penitence! The truth is there is no biblical or historical evidence that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. The distinguished theologian, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, adds “that even today for those who prefer a church with an male hierarchy, it’s easier to deal with Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner than an apostolic woman who had a voice and used it”!

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Sisters and brothers, on this Easter, let us remember that to believe in the risen Jesus is to believe that *goodness* can and will triumph over evil! Despite the systems, despite the magnitude and complexity of our problems today, *humanity can be* and, in the end, *will be* liberated! Every form of evil, sin and the consequences of sin: misery, frustration and fear; sickness and suffering; oppression and injustice *can be overcome*. **And the only power that can achieve this, is the power of faith that believes this!** For when all is said and done, faith is the power of goodness and truth — the power of God.

There is a power that can resist broken and evil systems and prevent them from destroying us. There is a motive that can replace and be stronger than the profit motive, there is an incentive that can mobilize the world, enabling the 'haves' to lower their standard of living and make us only too willing to distribute the world's wealth.

It's the same drive and incentives that motivated Jesus: compassion and faith. It has generally been called Faith, Hope and Love – but whatever we call it, we must understand it as the unleashing of the Divine through the natural power of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. The Resurrected Jesus is speaking to us in the events and problems of our time. Jesus can help us understand the voice of the truth, but when all is said and done *it is up to us to act!*

Amen!