

## An Easter Message from the Pastor

He is risen! But the question is, “Am I risen?” or “Are you risen?” Jesus rose on Easter Sunday for each of us. Perhaps we think that rising only has to do with what happens to us after our death. Jesus is alive now. He brought the gift of Easter into our world as we know it and live it now. The reality is that Jesus rose into a world that was very much like the Good Friday of just a few days ago. The gift of Easter is to our lives and to the world as yeast is to bread. Without Easter, life, with its passing pains and pleasures has no meaning, just as bread without yeast is as flat as the bread of the Jewish Passover meal. When we sprinkle yeast into the dough, however, it rises, and becomes the wonderful Easter bread we enjoy each year. In a similar way, when we sprinkle Easter’s gifts of faith, hope, love, and mercy into the Good Fridays of our lives and in the world, we rise out of the darkness and into the light and life of the Kingdom. For example, we all face crosses that take the form of physical, emotional, and/or spiritual challenges and difficulties. We might be dealing with an illness. We might be dealing with a person who is giving us a hard time. Perhaps there is a person we are having a hard time forgiving or a political or social issue that is causing anger or anxiety. Maybe we are facing financial difficulties and wondering how a bill is going to be paid. The evil one throws dark things these like these and others in our faces to try to get us to question God’s goodness. Have we ever found ourselves calling out to God and saying things like, “How could you be so good if You permit such evil in the world?” or “If you are so good God, why won’t you heal me or take away this cross?”

The problem of the goodness of God and evil in the world is indeed a challenging one. God our Father’s response to the prevalence of evil in our life is Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus not only identified Himself as the Truth and the Life, He also identified Himself as the Way. Many of the Jewish people in the time of our Lord were expecting a Messiah that was going to conquer their oppressors, the Romans, in a swift battle and at the point of a sword. Many expected the Christ to exact His punishment and take His vengeance by crushing their enemies. The Way of Christ, however, is the path to salvation, not condemnation. Jesus came into our world not just as a healer of our temporary and passing hurts and pains, but as our Savior. For example, rather than conquer His enemies by calling down fire from heaven, He seeks to change and transform each heart through mercy and love. Did this not happen to the hearts of two Roman centurions? There was the one who with great faith, said to the Lord, “only say the word and my servant will be healed?” Wasn’t it a Roman centurion who participated in the crucifixion that said, “truly this man was the Son of God,” after he heard our Lord say, “Father, forgive them, they not know what they do,” and gave up His spirit?

The Lord’s Way is indeed powerful. It is the way of hope, faith, and love that can turn the hearts of the Romans in our lives, including our own, and transform the world around us. Jesus invites us to accept Him not just as our healer, but as our Savior. He wants to offer us an eternal Kingdom not unlike the Garden of Eden. Are we going to settle for a passing world as Adam and Eve who chose the apple? God will never settle for anything less than the Kingdom for us, even if at first, like a child, we respond kicking and screaming because of our lack of understanding or our attachment to our own way, rather than The Way of God. Let us never doubt that God is good! Can we claim that in our most difficult and painful moments? Let us claim victory over the greatest lie with the greatest Truth, namely, God is Good! He is Risen! He is the Truth and the Life. He is the Way. The Resurrection of our Lord...the empty tomb...is a sign of that power over the world.

Are you risen? By the grace of our Baptism, with great faith and conviction, let us make the words of our Lord, who when on trial was asked, “Are you the Son of God., are you a King?” and respond with Him: “I AM!” “Are you ready to receive and live the gift of Easter, the gift of new life?” asked the Lord. We give thanks to God and keep in prayer the five who were baptized, the fourteen who were confirmed, and the eleven who received our Lord for the first time in Holy Communion, at the Easter Vigil who responded “I AM!”

May the peace and joy of Easter always reign in your hearts and in your home.  
Your local shepherd, --- Fr. Tom