



*Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration*

# The Resurrection of the Lord

*April 16, 2017*

*Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish*

## *Today's Themes in Scripture*

Today we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. While the birth of Jesus and his death on the cross inspire wonder, gratitude, and reverence, they can never be fully understood apart from his resurrection. The incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus form one seamless whole: taken together they represent the plan of God to redeem all of creation through him. To understand this, we must understand the purpose of Jesus' coming and what became possible through his death and resurrection.

Jesus came into a world where humanity was separated from God through sin, causing suffering and death for all of creation. Jesus set aside his divine status and power and took on a human life as part of God's plan to save his people. Because he was human like us, Jesus gave a merciful, human face to an unseen God. He announced the good news that God loves all people and desires to be close to them. He taught people how to love God and one another. In his words and actions, he demonstrated the mercy, compassion, healing, and forgiveness of God. He invited people to experience peace, joy, and transformation in the life he shared with the Father and Holy Spirit, and to join them in a kingdom of love that would last for eternity.

Since human life involves suffering and death, Jesus knew that he, too, would suffer and die. Jesus understood his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45)--the cost of setting a slave free. He did not view his death as a punishment, as if God required his death as payment for our sins. Jesus' death was not an act of divine retribution, but was part of the sacrifice he made in order to make salvation possible, a sacrifice he willingly made out of love for the Father and for us.

Jesus' death alone did not achieve our salvation. St. Paul wrote that if God had not raised Jesus from the dead, our faith would be in vain. Without Jesus' resurrection, we would have still died in our sins (1 Cor. 15:14, 17) but when God raised Jesus from the dead and restored his life, the claims of sin and death on humanity were destroyed. Because Jesus shares his life with all who believe in him, every believer is set free from the bondage of sin and death, becomes a new person in Christ, and is restored to God.

New life in Jesus is made possible through his life, death, and resurrection. We renew our baptismal promises at Easter as we recall the new life that Jesus has shared with us through Baptism. In him, we have every reason to hope and rejoice!

**Alleluia!**

## *Scripture Readings for Easter*

The Scriptures for Easter tell the story of our salvation. You are invited to read these Scriptures for yourself over the next week. In the readings for Easter, we journey from the creation of the world in Genesis, to the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter morning, and to one of Jesus' first appearances to his disciples. The source for each of the Easter Scriptures is provided below, followed by brief comments intended to help put the reading in context.

### **The Promise of Salvation: The Old Testament**

#### **Genesis 1: 1-2; 2**

The first of two creation stories in the Bible, this version employs a majestic, poetic style to convey how the world, and everything in it, came into being through the power of God's word. God creates humankind in his own image. He gives man and woman dominion over all his creation.

#### **Genesis 22: 1-18**

By this time in human history, humans have sinned and lost fellowship with God. God calls a man, Abraham, into a relationship with Him. He promises Abraham (who, with his wife Sarah, has no children) that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. God promises him a land in which they will live as his people. As a pledge of his promise, God blesses Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac, despite their old age. God asks Abraham if he would return Isaac to him in sacrifice. In absolute trust, Abraham prepares to give his only child back to God, but God stops him. Because of Abraham's obedience, God renews his promise: He will make Abraham the father of many nations.

#### **Exodus 14: 15—15:1**

Throughout their history, God's chosen people often turned their back on God. As a result of their sinfulness, they became weakened as a people and twice were enslaved by other nations. This passage tells the story of God's intervention on behalf of his people when they were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up a leader for them, Moses, who asks Pharaoh to let them go. When his pleas go unheeded, God sends plagues upon Egypt; still, Pharaoh refuses. So God gives Moses a plan of escape. The Red Sea stands between the enslaved Israelites and freedom.

When Moses, following God's direction, raises his arms, the water recedes and the people pass through on dry land. When Pharaoh and his mighty army give chase, Moses raises his arms again: the water flows back upon Pharaoh's ensuring army and destroys it. Israel's deliverance from slavery reveals the power of God and his determination to save them

#### **Isaiah 54: 5-14**

This message was delivered by the prophet Isaiah during Israel's second period of slavery. Exiled in Babylon, after the city and temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed, Isaiah offers a message of hope. Using a metaphor of spouses separated by infidelity, God acknowledges that he was angry at the unfaithfulness of Israel, but now with great tenderness and pity resolves to take Israel back. Not only that, but God, the faithful husband, renews his covenant with faithless Israel, vowing to love her forever, establish her and her children in peace, and protect her.

#### **Isaiah 55: 1-11**

The second reading from Isaiah is an invitation from God to the Israelites to return to him. Those who turn to God will find him extravagant in blessings, mercy, and forgiveness. Isaiah reminds the people that God will renew the covenant he made with David, whose descendant will preside over an everlasting kingdom. There is also a hint here that "other nations" will join Israel, suggesting God's covenant will be extended to all. God ends his invitation with a reminder that his words are not idle or empty. His will shall be achieved.

#### **Baruch 3: 9-15, 32; 4:4**

Baruch was a scribe for the prophet Jeremiah. He wrote during the time of the Babylonian exile. In this passage, Baruch reminds the people that it was their abandonment of the laws and ways of God that resulted in their capture and slavery. He admonishes them to return to the laws of God and follow them, for that is where true wisdom, strength, and understanding are found.

#### **Ezekiel 36: 16-17a, 18-28**

The prophet Ezekiel has a message for the Israelites captive in Babylon. God allowed them to fall into the hands of their enemies when they abandoned his law and defiled themselves with their evil conduct. However, God acknowledges that, while the Israelites have profaned his name by their wrongdoing, others nations have questioned how God could abandon the people of his covenant. So, for his name's sake, God will prove his holiness before all nations. God will rescue his people. He will call them back to the land he gave their fathers. He will thoroughly cleanse them of their sin. He will

give them new hearts--hearts that will want to obey his laws. He will keep his promise to their ancestors. He will be their God and they will be his people.

### **The Fulfillment of Salvation in Jesus: The New Testament**

#### **Romans 6: 3-11**

The letter of St. Paul to the Romans was written almost 600 years after the Babylonian exile. Israel has been restored to their land; the Temple of Jerusalem has been rebuilt. Jesus has been born, descended from the house of David. He has come announcing that the Kingdom of God has arrived. He preached a baptism of repentance so that the people could believe and enter the kingdom. St. Paul wrote his letter about 25 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul, a pious Jew and member of the Pharisees, persecuted the followers of Jesus until he had a revelation from God and came to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. Here, in one of his letters, he reflects on the meaning of our Baptism. According to Paul, when we are baptized, it is as if our life is fused with Jesus's life: our old selves die to sin when he dies, we rise to new life with him in his resurrection. After Baptism, we live for God in Jesus.

#### **Acts of the Apostles: 10: 34a, 37-43**

This reading from the Book of Acts is a report of a speech delivered by the apostle Peter after the Resurrection. Peter, no longer hiding in fear after the death of Jesus, is boldly proclaiming the Gospel. Peter has witnessed the risen, glorified Jesus. Peter has been transformed by this. He knows with certainty that Jesus was sent by God for the forgiveness of sins. He shares that news with everyone.

#### **1 Corinthians 5: 6b-8**

Paul writes to the Church in Corinth which is struggling. Some members have lapsed into sinful behavior. Using a metaphor of bread-making, St. Paul reminds them that the Sacrifice of Jesus has given them new lives (new dough). He reminds them that evil (like yeast) has a way of growing, so they must make every effort to remove it from their lives and live like Jesus.

### **THE GOSPELS**

#### **Mark 16: 1-7; John 20: 1-9; Luke 24: 13-35**

Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would die and rise again, but none of the sad and weary disciples would have expected to find an empty tomb on the morning after the Sabbath, when they went to anoint the body of their beloved Jesus. That day, the glorified Jesus, risen from the dead, begins his appearances to his disciples. Jesus helps them understand all that has happened.

# *From Desolation to Hope*

The readings for Easter Sunday seem to be a letdown from the no-holds-barred celebration of the Vigil that took us from creation through Christ's resurrection, punctuated with the new fire, bells and all those alleluias. On Easter morning the church takes a step back to say, "Now we need to think about all of this and integrate what it means." That's the process we'll be involved in for the next 50 days.

Today's selection from John's Gospel can't be considered as much more than an inconclusive resurrection account. It tells us that when Mary of Magdala and Peter and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved" saw the empty tomb, the beloved disciple "believed" but that none of them understood, leaving us with Mary Magdalen's core question: "Where is the Lord?"

One message this Gospel brings home is that our alleluias may be too facile. The disciples who knew Jesus most intimately were devastated at his death and confounded by the first signs of resurrection. Because of that it's probably a very good thing for us to be left with Mary at this point in her experience. If we can't imagine her devastation, we'll never understand her Easter joy.

When we read the resurrection Gospels objectively we realize that the empty tomb didn't prove anything. Far from being a sign of hope, it was more like a doubling down on the disciples' depression. The only really good news in this selection is that the beloved disciple "saw and believed," but what exactly he believed remains unclear. At best, he believed that Jesus had returned to the Father, a situation that did little to address the bitter angst of the question Mary represented for all of them, "What happened to the Lord?" along with, "What does it mean for us?"

In the face of that question, the Letter to the Colossians tells us to seek what is above. While that might sound like a prescription to imbibe in a good dose of denial, in reality it's exactly the opposite. The author who writes in Paul's name tells us to fix our hearts and minds on Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father. That will sound like pie in the sky until we remember what the early church would have envisioned when they heard it. Rather than picturing Christ the King robed in fine liturgical vestments, their image of the risen Lord had hands, feet and side scarred by the crucifixion. The original evangelizers had vivid memories of the man who had been beaten, mocked and spat upon, the one who had somehow found the breath and spirit to forgive his enemies as he died at their hands. When the early Christians.

set their minds on what was above they saw the innocent victim, now risen and continuing to share the power of God's invincible love.

Experts say that addicts can't be helped until they have "hit bottom." In the same way, only those who have endured a measure of Christ's passion or suffered in solidarity with those who have can fully appreciate what it means to "think of what is above, not what is on earth." In this sense, earth is the realm of injustice, envy and lies. It is the sphere in which Mary wandered on that first morning, the place of cruelty on top of death.

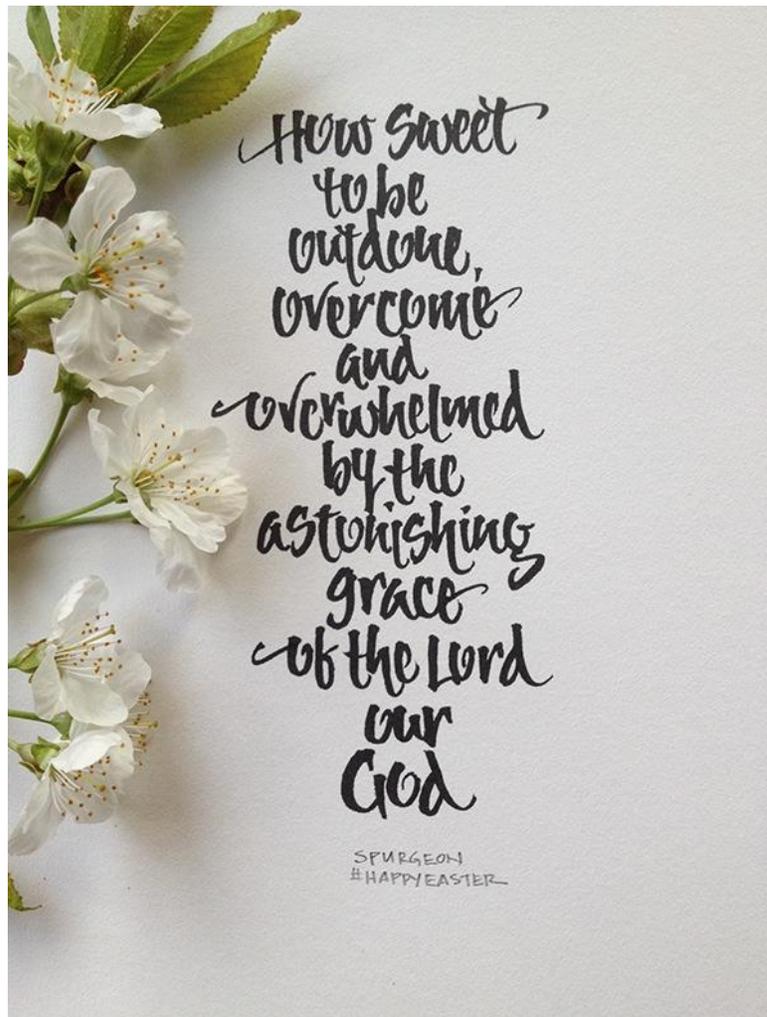
We know that later on that first day Mary would encounter Christ and would have her eyes raised to a different plane. As Paul says, Christ her life was about to appear and transform her imagination. As a result of her encounter with her risen Lord, she would begin to understand how Christ's resurrection changes everything. The wounds of Jesus had not disappeared, but they did not define him and the forgiveness he offered promised that those wounds need not define those who inflicted them. As she grasped this reality she was envisioning "what is above."

John and Paul convey this mystery in heady language. In today's first reading Peter says it more simply. He tells the bare bones story of Jesus and does his best to explain the resurrection. What it all comes down to for Peter is that knowing Jesus and meeting him as risen Lord converted him and his fellow witnesses into apostles, people who continued Jesus' own mission of proclaiming forgiveness.

Today's readings offer us a variety of approaches to the Easter mystery. They invite us to consider our own experience as a Gospel to be shared. We may know Easter faith as a slow journey from desolation to hope. It may be a vision of transformed reality that orients us to live each day from above. It can also be like Peter's simple response, "We knew it, saw it, and now must proclaim it." There are many models, and ours will probably grow and change. What is essential is our response to the question: "What does it mean for us?"

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How Sweet  
to be  
outdone,  
overcome  
and  
overwhelmed  
by the  
astounding  
grace  
of the Lord  
our  
God

SPURGEON  
#HAPPEASTER