

16 April 2017
EASTER SUNDAY

I have a confession to make - I am never more uncomfortable than when people come up and ask me, "DO YOU KNOW JESUS?" Frankly, the question makes me uncomfortable, because it forces me to articulate why I am a Catholic and a Christian.

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Why on God's green earth are you and I here today? Seriously, why bother coming into a crowded church on a beautiful spring day like today?

In Scripture, the Jewish people would travel up to Jerusalem – it is a city on a hill – for Passover each year. Passover marks the beginning of the new spring season after the winter rains in the Holy Land. The Hebrew word for Passover, *Pascha*, is where we get the word, "paschal" referring to Easter.

Last week we celebrated Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. His entry into Jerusalem was the beginning of his *paschal* journey towards Easter. It began with his earthly success, surrounded by friends. But...

As Jesus moved into Jerusalem, the Good News he brings is frustrated. The disciples sense trouble ahead, and many of them jump

ship. He is openly mocked and rejected, beaten and spit upon. He undergoes physical and mental anguish.

Good Friday reminds us that there is no new life at Easter without passing through the pains of death. You and I lose loved ones in visible ways — the unexpected death of parents, siblings, and friends. But we also carry unseen losses that ring in the corners of our hearts everyday: the death of relationships...of jobs...of hopes...of youthful optimism...of trust...

But God does not send us down dead ends. **Jesus has paved this paschal path – this path to Easter - for us.** He is our forerunner. In John 14, Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled; have faith in God and faith in me. I will go forth to prepare a place for you; and I will come back to take you with me, that where I am, you may also be.”

A forerunner doesn't run the marathon of life for us, but he does show us the way. **“Do ya know Jesus??”** Being Christian means we are not afraid to run the full course of our life, because Jesus prepares the way, the truth, and the life. For us Christians, it means that because of Jesus' Resurrection, every turn that life takes is *pregnant with meaning*. We say that “Christians are an Easter people” – that doesn't mean that we're always going on Easter egg hunts, eating too much lamb, and wearing natty bowties and pastels. Though today, please do!

No friends, to be an Easter people means that no matter what cards life has dealt us these days -- **we are somewhere on the paschal path with Jesus.** I'm going to ask a series of questions now – I want you to see where you are on your journey to Easter:

1) Are you in a successful part of your life? Do you enjoy satisfaction in school and work? Do you enjoy good health and friendships? If so you are in solidarity with Jesus' active, successful ministry. Jesus had friends and family and drank wine at weddings and ate with all manner of people. You feel the energy and satisfaction that comes from success and camaraderie. Or maybe you're not with Jesus here.

2) Maybe you are feeling judged, or rejected, or isolated these days? Perhaps there has been broken trust in a relationship, or someone has wronged you. Perhaps you are suffering the consequences of decisions you, or others, have made. Maybe you are dreading a tough event to come -- and you are anxious. You are in solidarity with Christ at his the Last Supper, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, and in his trial before Pilate.

3) Are you feeling burdened and alone? Have you lost a loved one recently? Are you undergoing mental or spiritual anguish? You are in solidarity with the Christ who mourns the death of his friend Lazarus, and who is himself on his way to the Cross.

4) Are you going through a moment of illness or diminishment yourself? Does your experience of diminishment, or fear of death, frighten you? This is solidarity with Christ as he suffers quietly on the cross --asking the Father, "my God, why have you forsaken me?"

5) Perhaps you have already undergone some painful event, but you are waiting for the spark of life to return again. Maybe you are in the heavy clouds of depression. Or perhaps you are navigating life after a death or a divorce. You are in solidarity with Jesus in the tomb on Holy Saturday, as he waits for new life.

6) Maybe you are looking back at something that was very painful – but now the sting is gone. Is there something you suffered through and now you feel **alive** again, with fresh eyes and a renewed spirit? You feel like your *old* self: strong, comfortable in your own skin, and restored to fullness of life? You are experiencing the Resurrection with Jesus – you are tasting, even now, Easter joy.

- *Where are you on the paschal path these days? Suddenly, that uncomfortable question is not “DO YOU KNOW JESUS?” but, “where is Jesus accompanying me as I journey to Easter?”*

This brings us to my original question -- ***why bother coming to church on a beautiful spring morning?***

For us Catholics, the **Church in its wisdom gives us the liturgical calendar.** Our calendar, every year, walks us through the range of human experiences that Jesus experienced.

- Every year begins with anticipation in Advent and the gift of new life at Christmas.
- Every year has an Ash Wednesday and Lent – a time to return to God, to refocus through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
- Every year has a Good Friday – the inevitability of suffering and death.
- Every year has a period of tomb-like waiting on Holy Saturday.
- And every year celebrates the promise of new life in our Easter season.

When we give ourselves to the rhythms of the liturgical year, we are not surprised when life and death, grief and joy, happen. AND -- we come to recognize where we are on the paschal path. Easter reminds us: ***God doesn't lead his beloved down dead ends. Our church prepares us spiritually for everything that life brings.***

And to say we are Catholic Christians changes how we relate to one another. Look around you. ***Each of the people here – in your family, in the pews, even us up here in the sanctuary – each of us is somewhere on our own paschal path. That realization changes how we relate to one another.***

Think of all the people who bug you. That loud, insecure woman at work? Maybe she's feeling isolated and anxious, with Jesus in the Garden. The old widower next door whom you politely avoid, because you just know he'll talk your ear off? Maybe he's with Jesus alone on the cross. The young hotshot in your office who seems to be angling for your job? Maybe he's with Jesus in his successful public ministry, and he is trying to provide for his young family. Meanwhile, you are feeling overlooked and facing diminishment. Where are other people in your life on the paschal path? Your spouse? Your parents? Your children?

Through a little examination and displacement of myself as the center of the story, I realize that the universe is not conspiring against my joy. We are all, each of us, somewhere on this paschal path. When we gather at the Eucharist to share the Body of Christ with each other, we can be a source of solidarity and encouragement for each other.

As Timothy Radcliffe, OP writes, "Christianity is a drama. It breaks the tyranny of the present moment. However bad something in life seems, the story eventually opens the way forward."

You and I are always on the paschal path – through earthly success, rejection and trials, through deaths and tomb-like waiting – and even in our Easter Resurrection. ***Where are you today?***

The next time someone asks us, ***“Do you know Jesus?”*** we can say with confidence, “yes – because He first knows me. Jesus shows me the way, the truth and the life.” And that, dear friends, is reason enough to celebrate today.

Happy Easter, Alleluia, Alleluia!