

Easter Sunday

One of the promises Jesus made to His followers was, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." The



most precious of all gifts is the gift of life. But it is one I am afraid we take very much for granted. Only grave illness or extreme danger seems to make us appreciate how great it is to be alive. Then we begin to see things, appreciate things and people in a new joyous way. It is akin to seeing a bleak winter give way to the fresh greenery of Spring.

Today the Church sings out the antiphon, "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it." This is the day we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and still lives in our midst. That is the real point of Easter—not merely that Jesus came forth from the tomb two thousand years ago, but that he lives with us, here, today, and forever. "Behold, I am with you all days even to the end of the world."

Not only does he live but He makes His life available to us. He has defeated death and the same power which defeated death can be ours not only at journey's end and to make the hour of death the prelude to eternal life, but available here and now to help us be more alive. We rejoice because we have found a new hope—of something more in life, of something better.

Gone are the shadows of our own nothingness, our disillusionment, our sad query, "Is that all there is?" A bright new springtime sun, the Son of God, calls us to wake up and live with Him to celebrate life because now it can be freed from binding passions and deadly defeats. Now it can find meaning and real dignity and enthusiasm and purpose. Life doesn't have to be smothered by "what's the use" or drowned in boredom and defeat.

The glory of Easter is this: Jesus lives and therefore I can find a new and better

life, be more alive to everything and everybody, including myself. I can rise too—above circumstances, above pettiness, above my heavy selfishness which weighs me down. Like the two disciples who walked the road to Emmaus, sad, disillusioned, let down because the Jesus they had hoped in, had died on Friday. But now He walks with them and they are filled with joy and new hope when He reveals Himself to them "in the breaking of the bread." For those who, even today, discover the living Jesus in the breaking of bread at the Eucharistic table there is no need for the proof of the Resurrection. Jesus is there and joy is there.

The celebration of Easter is sometimes called the Paschal mystery because Jesus has become our Passover. Just as the Jews of old passed over from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, so Jesus by His Resurrection has given us the power to be free from death and its absurdity. Through Him we can be free of the day by day dying which men are enslaved to. He offers us the power and the will and the love to rise above our seemingly helpless sad condition; to deliver human beings from the death of hunger and poverty; to free men from the fetid death of war, to raise human beings from the death of degradation and meaninglessness; to free people from the suffocating and destructive slavery of passion. In short, Jesus can lead us all to a new and better life.

For many of us life is difficult and painful. Even for these, a new day is available. Back in the days of the Korean War there was a chaplain by the name of Emil Kapaun, who with a large group of his men was captured by the Chinese. On the long march north of the Yalu River he helped carry a stretcher. He washed and replaced fetid bandages. At the risk of his life he foraged for corn by night to feed his starving men. His captors realized that as long as he was there they could never break the spirit of his soldiers. One of them said later, "By his very presence he could turn a stinking Korean mud hut into a cathedral."

Was it his life or the life of Christ in him which was able to raise the whole sordid mess to a level of hope and brightness?

The same could be done for our own private world and human society itself—if we but will it. Indeed, there must be death just as there was Good Friday, but the trade we make is the trade of the puny death of our selfishness for the warm Easter sun of love with all its hope and promise. Someone once said, "If we walk away from the light which is Christ (the light of Easter morn) the shadows of the evils of life lengthen before us and we become victims of fear and anxiety. As we walk toward the light which is Christ the shadow falls behind us. When we are directly under the light, the shadow disappears."

Easter has happened and is happening. But has it happened to us? The choice is entirely ours. "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into His glory?" We give so little to gain so much. We live half a life instead of embracing a full life. It is the only real tragedy of the human state. As Francis Thompson put it, "All which thy child's mistake fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home: Rise, clasp my hand, and come."

In John Masefield's drama, THE TRIAL of JESUS, there is a striking passage in which Longinus, the Roman centurion in command of the soldiers at the Cross, comes back to Pilate to hand in a report of his day's work. The report is given: then Procula, Pilate's wife, beckons to the centurion and begs him to tell her how the Prisoner died. And when the story has been told, "Do you think He is dead?" she suddenly asks. "No," answers Longinus, "I don't." "Then where is he?" "Let loose in the world my lady, where . . . no one can stop his Truth."

This is the day which the Lord has made—"Rise! clasp My Hand and come." Celebrate life!

Guest Columnist

By Father Albert Simonetti

The Annunciation — the Original 'Good News'

March 25 marked the feast of the Annunciation, the "announcement" of the "good news" to Mary that she would mother the Messiah.

In recent years, we have witnessed a de-emphasis of devotion to Mary. Even the event of the Annunciation has been toned down by some.

For an answer to "Why?" I turned to Father Sebastian Falcone, a Capuchin Father who teaches the New Testament at St. Bernard's Seminary. Incidentally, Father assists us from time to time at Annunciation Parish. Here in brief is a summary of our discussion:

First, to put Jesus at the center of the Christian experience, Vatican II found it necessary to re-align Mary's role in redemption. Over the past four generations or so of Catholic devotion to Mary, the Marian emphasis tended to isolate her—truly the "Mother of the Lord and of the Church"—from a genuine relationship to her Son.

Second, Jesus' infancy was not part of the Church's earliest preaching. The "family recollections" of His early years are carried only in Luke and Matthew. And no other New Testament document beyond Luke's gospel carries the Annunciation account.

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So today, rather than emphasize the "dramatic" scene of the announcement, the focus is on the basic meaning of the event.

Through this mystery, Mary was being invited to offer the service of motherhood to God's saving plan for His people. By her affirmation ("Let it be done") Mary was cooperating with God's "Yes" to all the promises of old He was about to fulfill.

From that viewpoint, Mary ranks as the most effective hearer of God's word. Since "to hear" means to be obedient, Mary conceived the Divine Word in her heart before she ever conceived Him in her womb.

Through the spirit of faith and obedience, Mary had to grow gradually, even daily, in her discovery of the mystery that God was choosing to unfold under her motherly care. She "pondered in her heart" this mystery surrounding her Son, even though others also close to Jesus did not understand.

By her prayerful groping, in a score of day-to-day activities—the shopping in the marketplace, the laundering at the village stream, the weaving of cloth, preparing meals, cleaning house, visiting friends—

she came to realize that God fulfills His highest plans not through the sensational and spectacular, but through the ordinary routines of the workaday world. Hers was the great love of the little way.

Despite her special call, she balanced prayerfulness of Nazareth by her ready and generous service of her aging relative, Elizabeth, herself soon to become a mother. Despite her special call, Mary experienced the piercing loss of her Son, not once but twice. Once, in the temple as He made inquiries "about His Father's business," and again on Calvary as He discovered that "the Father's will" had to take precedence over a Mother's love and His Disciples' needs.

The account of the Annunciation becomes most meaningful when we try to present the full human dimension of the Mother of Jesus in the circumstances of our daily life. I think then she is easier to follow, and a lot more appealing to us frail mortals who struggle to be faithful in the midst of a complex world.

It is in this very fact that the ultimate beauty of the Annunciation account is to be found. The Annunciation is the model of all our relationships with God. First God speaks: the divine initiative. Then we respond: our human word, like Mary's "So be it!" Only at that point in the divine-human dialogue, through faith and freedom, has Christ become a living reality at the center of our lives.