

Real belief in the resurrection requires action

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

The celebration of Easter, the most important feast in the church's liturgical year, carries us to the very core of Christian faith and hope.

At Easter we reaffirm our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, mindful of the words of St. Paul that "if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, our faith" (First Corinthians 15:14).

More than that, if Christ is not risen, our faith is "vain," we are still in our sins, and "those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (v. 18). We would be people without hope, "the most pitiable people of all" (v. 19).

But resurrection faith goes beyond the mere belief that Christ has been raised from the dead. And resurrection hope goes

beyond the mere conviction that in the end we shall enjoy eternal life with Christ.

Easter discloses to us a new way of being human, in community — a community of brothers and sisters, not of strangers and adversaries.

To believe in the resurrection is to walk the path of self-sacrifice and of suffering for the sake of others, as the pre-condition of new life.

The pathway to Easter, therefore, is Good Friday. To believe in the resurrection is to live in fidelity to the Lord's teaching that "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24).

A life without generous, even heroic, self-giving is a life without Good Friday. And a life without Good Friday is a life without Easter.

Real belief in the resurrection, therefore, requires that we act on that belief.

Christians who refuse to endure any sacrifice for the sake of those in greater need live in contradiction to resurrection faith. For them, it is as if the resurrection did not happen at all, as if Christ never submitted himself to the cross in order to bring forth the fruit of redemption and new life.

Our Christian leaders generally, and certainly those in the so-called mainline traditions, have been in fundamental agreement about the implications of our resurrection faith.

The content and tone of their official statements on issues pertaining to social and economic justice, human rights and peace, are clear and consistent.

They call upon us to stand with the oppressed over against the powerful, the poor



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over against the rich, the suffering over against the comfortable, the peace-makers over against the war-makers, and so forth.

But there is more to Easter than resurrection faith. There is also resurrection hope.

Resurrection hope is not simply a hoping against hope, a crossing of one's fingers in the face of the dangers and setbacks of life, the desperate throwing of a "hail Mary" pass into a crowded end zone.

Hope, by contrast with simple optimism, is a theological virtue, alongside faith and love. Hope does not merely look toward the day when we will enter the final Kingdom of God, as if that Kingdom were ready-made.

Resurrection hope impels us to cooperate with God, even now, in the building of a new earth, the expectation of which "must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one" (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 39).

Resurrection hope, therefore, fixes our attention on the world of our brother and sister in need. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers" and our sisters (First John 3:14).

In this way of "kenosis," or self-emptying, for the sake of others, the Christian enters into the passion and death of Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... Because of this, God greatly exalted him" (Philippians 2:7,9).

This is what it means to live as Christ lived. He did not live for himself, but for others. To live for others is to put into practice our resurrection hope.

In the end, Easter will mean little to us this year if it leaves us as unconverted, as uncaring and as covetous as before.

The resurrection is not something only to be believed in and hoped for, but something to be lived out, in faith and in hope, for others.

When an official came to Jesus and asked what he would have to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus reminded him of the commandments.

"All of these I have observed from my youth," the official replied.

"There is one thing left for you," Jesus continued, "sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor ... Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

When the official heard this, "he became quite sad, for he was very rich" (18:23).

No one said it would be easy.

Caiaphas learns of Judas' plans to betray Jesus

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Even after Samuel, a member of the Jewish council and one of the wealthiest lawyers in Jerusalem entered the room, Caiaphas remained staring out from the window with his back to his visitor.

The high priest was transfixed by the huge crowds below. It would soon be the Passover. Many had come a long distance for their annual pilgrimage to the temple.

"I don't think I've ever seen such a mob," Caiaphas said when he finally turned from the window much to Samuel's relief.

"Nor have I," Samuel replied. "But you didn't call me here this morning to discuss the crowds."

Caiaphas broke into a smile. It was not his usual expression so his face looked almost unnatural to Samuel. "That's what I like about you, Samuel," he said. "It's your ability to come right to the point. You're like a precise knife, cutting deep into the heart of the matter!"

"This is about Jesus, isn't it?" Samuel said.

Caiaphas' face assumed its stern, somber look again. "I've had another report about our problem. Jesus has come for the



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Passover. And he did not arrive in Jerusalem unnoticed," Caiaphas said. "Many of the people are spreading the story about Lazarus being raised from the dead. Great crowds of these believers lined the streets leading to the city as Jesus entered. It was quite a show with them all waving palm branches and shouting about him being a king."

"I've heard these reports, too," Samuel nodded.

"What's to be done now? Jesus is staying with his closest followers in a house in the city," Caiaphas continued. "We can't just go there and arrest him. I fear a riot from all those who think he is the Messiah. We'll be in for more trouble than we ever considered from our Roman rulers in the first place!"

It was Samuel's turn to grin broadly like a cat about to swallow its prey. He had come here today not only at the high priest's request, but with other information concerning Jesus. Out of deference to the high priest, he had held this news back shrewdly until the proper time.

"Your anxiety is useless," Samuel said. "In fact, I never considered that our elimination of the Jesus problem would have been so easy."

When Samuel took a moment to gloat with self satisfaction, Caiaphas snapped with impatience. "Continue!" the high priest shouted, breaking Samuel from his reverie.

"The bird is in hand!" Samuel announc-

ed. "In a few days, our problem will no longer exist. One of Jesus' own closest followers has agreed to betray him."

"Who is it," Caiaphas asked.

"The man's name is Judas," Samuel continued. "He's a scholarly, philosophical type. Frankly, I was surprised that he ever decided to be one of Jesus' followers in the first place. It seems that the kingdom Jesus promises is not what Judas envisioned."

"And so, now what?"

"As you said, we must be prudent and arrest Jesus when he is away from the crowds. There is a garden near the Kidron Valley where Jesus goes often with just a few of his followers to pray. Tonight, Judas is certain that Jesus will be there. It would be my suggestion to get the temple guards ready to arrest Jesus."

Caiaphas didn't answer immediately. He seemed to be deep in thought about everything that Samuel had just told him. "Just what kind of kingdom did this Judas envision?" he asked.

"Certainly one without Roman rule," Samuel replied. "One in which there is power and wealth for the deserving."

Caiaphas shook his head with understanding. "Just how much will this betrayal cost us?" he asked.

"I was able to strike a deal for 30 pieces of silver," Samuel replied. "Not much for a man's life."

"We are fair and decent men. Jesus will have a trial. In the meantime, I'll get the money and the temple guards ready," Caiaphas said before turning back to his vigil at the window.

Samuel took this as his cue to take his leave.

Meditation: Do I reject Jesus because he does not answer my prayers the way I think he should?

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