

HOMILY EASTER SUNDAY – YEAR B

“Forgiveness is the New Life of Easter”

One of the pleasures of Easter is debriefing with others how Easter was celebrated this year. One community helped their young people enter into the spirit of Easter by burying the “Alleluia” on Ash Wednesday. They placed posters with the word “Alleluia” on them into a big box before the homily. On Easter Sunday, the kids were invited to open the box and out came helium balloons with the word “Alleluia” written on them. Their surprise, delight and exuberance captured the spirit of the celebration and affected the whole assembly.

Does it feel like Easter for you this morning? Or perhaps it does not feel like Easter at all? Some may even be resenting the “alleluia[s]” of this Easter day. Sometimes our feelings do not match an event. We feel out of synch.

There is good news - Easter can happen to you anytime, through forgiveness and acceptance. Forgiveness is the New Life of Easter!

First of all, Easter is forgiveness. Our reaction to hurt is most often anger that turns into resentment. God’s reaction to hurt, our sin, is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The forgiveness of Jesus on the cross, overcomes death in the shape of resurrection. The first reading from Acts puts it clearly: “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Easter happens to us, when we can receive forgiveness from anyone we may have hurt, and whenever we are finally, truly able to forgive from the heart anyone who has hurt us. In the end, it is the forgiving love of Christ risen from the dead that flows through us to the one who hurt us, that truly sets us free from the prison of anger, resentment and revenge.

Easter happened to me in a big way when, after a fifteen year struggle, I was finally able to forgive my own father from the heart, but only after experiencing my own powerlessness to forgive, which opened me up to receiving that power of forgiveness from God.

Easter is also acceptance. Mary Magdalene teaches us that. How fortunate that she stayed in the cemetery, weeping and grieving, after Peter and John went home. She was the first to see Jesus, and to hear him say those words, “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.” With those words Jesus actually encourages her to grieve his loss. He is essentially saying, “Mary, I am back, but not really back. There is more. Just have faith, let go of me, let me ascend to the Father, and I will send you my Spirit to be with you always.”

This passage points us to the Ascension and Pentecost, the final two stages of the Paschal Mystery. These two stages which the Church celebrates after Easter complete the Resurrection and really break the cycle of repeated sin that clings to us so closely. For Easter to truly happen to us, we too, like Mary Magdalene, who was forgiven much, must face our sins, confess them, receive God's forgiveness, and then move on to grieve the loss of our defects of character, let them go, accept our losses, and receive the Spirit of Easter and Pentecost.

Collette was abused by a relative as a young girl. In her anger, shame and depression, she abused countless other people in turn. She escaped into alcohol for years until she finally could not live with herself anymore, and started a healing journey. It took her a year to slowly tell her story, share her hurt and move towards forgiving her abuser by letting go of revenge. She was also able to face and admit the pain she caused so many others, and wrote letters to them asking for forgiveness and seeking to make amends. Finally she was able to celebrate reconciliation, humbly and honestly.

Later, at the Eucharist, she placed her crumpled up inventory on the altar. At the offertory, she burned the paper. After mass, she went outside and blew the ashes away. They simply disappeared. When she realized that the forgiveness of God meant that God would not even remember her sin, like the invisible ashes, she was truly set free to live again. She experienced Easter that day, because forgiveness is the new life of Easter.

The Eucharist we celebrate this morning makes present for us the forgiveness, the love, the acceptance of Christ that led to his resurrection that Easter morning.

May our celebration today strengthen our faith, lead us to forgive those who hurt us, accept our losses, seek reconciliation and experience Easter in our lives right here and right now.