

EASTER SUNDAY HOMILY – YEAR A (Homily 02)

“Unleavened Bread, not Old Yeast”

(Acts 10:34, 36-43; Psalm 118; Col 3:1-4; John 20:1-18)

The theme of new creation emerges strongly from the readings this Easter morning. In the Gospel, we hear the words, “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark.” That is St. John announcing a new creation, one that far surpasses the creation account in Genesis. And in the second reading from Corinthians, Paul encourages us to clean out the old yeast and be a brand new batch of unleavened bread.

The message is clear – Easter is all about being a new creation, new life, a new beginning.

The question that may be forming in our minds is how is that to happen? After all, Easter or not, everything else in our world seems to be very much same old, same old.

The answer is found in the first reading and in the Gospel. It is actually very simple – forgiveness and acceptance. That is the way into a new creation, into being a brand new batch of unleavened bread.

In the first reading, St. Peter is very clear. Whoever believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Being forgiven and learning how to forgive is the essence of the new life of Easter. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. That is the nature of God. God does not even remember our sins; they cease to exist as far as God is concerned. And of course, the Our Father that we pray every Sunday reminds us that we receive that forgiveness to the extent that we are willing to try and forgive those who have hurt us. Forgiveness, received and extended, is one key to the new life of Easter.

Jimmy was sent by his wife to see his pastor, because his behavior was driving her crazy. He was depressed and unable to sleep. He had seen doctors and counselors and received all kinds of pills, none of which were making any difference. The pastor was able to uncover that although Jimmy had been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he had never done a sincere, honest Step 5 (Admit to God, himself and one other person, the exact nature of his wrongs). Instead, he was two-stepping the program, going directly from Step 1 to Step 12. When the pastor pointed out that humble honesty was the key to the program, Jimmy finally cleaned house, did

a major Step 5 and confessed his darkest secrets. He walked away a free man, and talked about that experience at many Round-Ups after that. He had experienced the new life of Easter through forgiveness.

Regarding the second key to this new life, acceptance, we turn to the Gospel. There the apostles go right into the tomb. Without understanding it much at all, they came to believe that Jesus was not just stolen from the tomb, but had indeed risen from the dead. But it is Mary Magdalene who encounters the risen Lord first. In that experience, he teaches her to mourn and grieve her loss. While her first instinct is to grab hold of Jesus and cling to him, Jesus tells her not to hang on to him. She is to let him ascend to the Father, so that she would be able to receive his Spirit, along with the others, in a new way. He had changed and was no longer the same historical Jesus she knew in the past. He was now the Jesus of faith, and called that faith out of her. That is the faith we must have, to go into our own tombs, to grieve and mourn our own losses, if we are to experience the new life of Easter.

John, a First Nations person, was preparing to participate in a four day fast. Just before entering into the fast, he overheard a former director of the Nechi Institute in Edmonton tell someone that 80% of the clients who go for treatment at Poundmaker Lodge in St. Albert are struggling with unresolved grief issues.

That statement stayed in his mind as he fasted. The next day, he observed a green log sizzling in the fire. The rings and two termite holes on one end of the log made it look like a face. Suddenly, sap started pouring out of one of the termite holes. The log was crying. The message for him was clear. He had to cry, to do some grief work. Unsure how to do that, he found an empty old car nearby and sat inside, recalling all the things in his life that had not worked out for him. His sadness and sorrow landed on him like a heavy load. He started to cry and pound the steering wheel, then the seat so as to not hurt his hand. The old car filled with dust and he had to get out. As he did so, however, he felt filled with an amazing energy and peace. With a start, he realized that he had grieved. He had mourned his losses and had received a spirit of acceptance. He had experienced the new life of Easter.

Our celebration this Easter Sunday morning is an invitation to us to be like Peter, John and Mary Magdalene, enter into our tombs, deal with our losses and hurt through acceptance and forgiveness, and experience the new life of Easter.

We will then be that new batch of unleavened bread that St. Paul describes, and experience the new creation that St. John mentions in the Gospel. Like Mary Magdalene, we will be able to go out and tell others that we have experienced the Risen Lord.

