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## **Christ is Risen, Alleluia!**

On Easter Sunday, we have every reason to be joyful. During this past week, we have followed in the footsteps of Jesus. Events of the past became present realities for us. The mystery of redemption unfolded before our eyes. We experienced the very Paschal Mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus and our own dying to self so that we might rise to newness of life.

On the Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday), we saw the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. We sang our "hosannas" and proclaimed Jesus as our Lord and Messiah. And yet, the euphoria of the moment quickly dimmed as we heard read to us the Passion Story from the Gospel of Luke. In his passion narrative, Saint Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the innocent one being led to the slaughter. Three times Pilate declares Jesus innocent. King Herod does the same three times over. The good thief declares from his own cross: "This man has done nothing criminal," and wins the reward of hearing Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Luke also emphasizes that Jesus, as the innocent one, is also the one who forgives, heals and reconciles. From the cross, Jesus declared: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." How quickly are we willing to forgive those who hurt us?

Last Thursday, called holy, we were present for the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his closest friends. That meal has become the center of our faith life. Jesus literally dines with us. He invites us to partake of his body and blood being offered up for us. He asks us to keep his memory always alive. Approaching the altar table seems so easy. But this Jesus also makes demands of us if we are truly to be numbered among his followers. Jesus commands that we wash the feet of one another, the feet of the stranger, the feet of the poor and unwanted, the feet of the sinner and those accused of crime. Do we really accept in our lives the truth that foot washing is an essential prerequisite for the worthy reception of the Eucharist?

Last Friday was the day we call good, because on this day Jesus offered up his life for the salvation of all. In carrying the cross along the way to Calvary, Jesus took upon himself all human crosses. He underwent terrible suffering. He experienced abandonment by his closest friends; by those who were supposedly his disciples and even abandonment by his heavenly Father. Shortly before giving up his spirit, Jesus cried out in anguish: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Throughout it all, his God remained silent and yet Jesus trusted that his life and mission would be vindicated. The suffering of Jesus reminds us that we, his followers, will also walk to many "calvaries." At times, we might feel abandoned and betrayed. Yet, in the crosses of life we find hope. We too are called to embrace the cross as the symbol of victory and to help alleviate the crosses which burden others. Are we willing to do this, or are we unwilling to accept that Good Friday is only "good" in terms of God's mysterious plan of salvation?

The Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening is one of the most moving liturgies of the Church. We gather like the early Christians, waiting and watching for the Risen Savior. The new fire is blessed, reminding us that Christ is our light to dispel the darkness around us. The paschal candle (the Easter candle) reminds us that this night is different than any other night. In the words of the great Exultet, which is sung as the paschal candle fills the darkened church building with its light: This is "the most blessed of all nights, chosen by God to see Christ rising from the dead... This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave... This night is truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and we are reconciled with God."

Then the assembly listens again to the story of salvation history beginning with the story of creation from the first chapters of the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning - God created." Then we listen to the call of Abraham, Moses leading the people of Israel from slavery to freedom, the call of the prophets for a people to seek forgiveness and true conversion. After the Litany of the Saints, the elect (Catechumens not yet baptized) receive the Sacrament of Baptism and the candidates make a profession of faith for entrance into the Church.

This year, I am happy to report that 1,240 persons came into the church in our diocese at the Easter Vigil. They wanted to become a part of our journey just as we want to be a part of theirs. So many want to join us because they find love and hospitality, acceptance and welcome from us. Our faith invites them to place Christ in the center of their living. The story of conversion is also our own story. We must ask, "has this Lenten journey brought us closer to Christ as the center of our lives?"

The Easter gospels are both from Luke and John. With the holy women, with Peter and John, we run to the place of burial and there we find the empty tomb. The message of resurrection is ever ancient and ever new. Christ is not “here” – not in a tomb, inhabiting the realm of the dead – but he has emptied death of its power.

This Easter once again, we are summoned to live, proclaim and celebrate this victory by resisting all those forms of death and violence that saturate today’s culture. Easter faith is much more than an affirmation of Jesus’ victory over death. It summons us to return to the words and deeds of Jesus as found in the gospel. We are to live as if we truly believe that Jesus lives among us. Like Thomas in the gospel story, we are to touch the wounds of Jesus as seen in the lives of those around us. Jesus continues to die in the lives of those who suffer pain and anguish. In the words of the Easter hymn: “Life and death are locked in wondrous struggle”. Yes, we can surely proclaim that Jesus lives because “he goes before us into Galilee” where we shall see him and encounter his presence.

I wish you and your families a joy filled Easter. Christ is risen, Alleluia!

+ Walter F. Sullivan  
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