

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2010

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Good morning. Happy Easter! You can tell spring is coming, my allergies are in full bloom up here with all of these miserable plants. But anyway I have been sneezing for two days. Anyway today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Jesus, His resurrection is the reason for our hope. You know when I founded the Reason For Our Hope Foundation I wanted to make it clear that Christians by definition are people filled with hope. We are not people filled with doom and gloom. If you are a doom and gloom person then there is something wrong with you. That is not Christianity. Easter is what Christianity is about, the resurrection of Jesus of Christ. And because He is alive then we should live also.

I was talking a little bit about this last night, as I was dealing with my own kids in spiritual direction at the Seminary I said, "Okay you are always doing," you know we Catholics are very big on Lent. I think we are fixated with suffering, way too many Catholics. You know we love the horrible crucifixes and that which are important and it helps focus us on what Christ did for us. But some people stay there and they want to spend all of the time there. They love Lent. They are not really wacky, excited about Easter. They think that people that are excited about Easter there is something wrong. By definition we should just be suffering. I don't buy it at all. That by definition as St. Augustine said as one of the early Church fathers, "The Christian is an alleluia from the top of his head to the tip of his toes." That we are an alleluia people. Then you get St. Irenaeus again one of the early Church fathers who said "that the glory of God is man fully alive." So as we focus, and the Church is very clear on this, right, the Church has a shorter period for Lent than we do for Easter. You do realize that right? The Easter season is longer than the Lenten season.

And so again what I said to my seminarians I said, "Listen, it is not either or it is both and." So we are not people that throw out the suffering we go through the suffering to experience the resurrection. So we don't say we shouldn't focus on the suffering of Christ. Oh we sure should. Paul would say, "I preach nothing but Christ and Christ crucified." But, we also need to bring the balance. And the balance is that we are resurrection people. The balance is Christ now lives forever. Christ can never live again. And what happens for us is we need to be people that focus on that and live that and become this resurrection people. So what I would encourage you to do is as much time and energy you put on to Lent, and a lot of you do - I give up this, I give up this, I give up this, great - now I want you to do the same thing for Easter. Instead of giving up I want you to add things. For instance add time in prayer. Add time in prayer with the resurrected Lord. You know Christ isn't dead, He is alive. Some of you are sitting here this Easter Sunday thinking that yeah I come to church because my mother's happy if I come for Easter, so whatever it happens to be that but I am bored out of my mind. I can't wait until it is over. Sounds like this priest is going to preach long. UGH! The reality is, is that because you don't know Christ is alive? It's just going through the motions. It is like going to a football game, like cheering for the Steelers or cheering for the bum team, the Browns. It is going through the motions of those things. I am one of these type people and I like it or I don't like it. This is not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about being in a living, loving relationship with the risen Lord. For those of you who think I don't know. I never experienced Him. Come here. WHACK! Do you know why you haven't experienced Him? Very simple, because you haven't spent time with Him. How do you expect to fall in love or come to know that anyone's alive unless you take some time out of your life and decide to spend time.

For me it was when I was seventeen years old. You know I sat there and I came to a realization that I was going to die someday. And I thought, you know just because my parents are Catholic. Or just because I was brought up in one particular way doesn't make it true now does it? I could have been brought up Buddhist. I could have been brought up Muslim. I could have been brought up Atheist. So just because you are brought up a certain way does not make it true in any shape or form. So I have to start finding out what was true. So I started looking at all different kinds of religions. In Pittsburgh we had a big Hare Krishna community. Remember Hare Krishna's? Whoa! And my great-great-great-great grandparents, we had Jewish people in my family so I looked at the Jewish religion. My father was Presbyterian so I looked at the Protestants. I looked at all of them. The reality is I kept looking at all of these different things because I wanted to find out what was true because I wasn't going to give my life to anything if it is not true. I would sit in the Church of the Epiphany in downtown Pittsburgh. I would sit there every day during my lunch break because I use to work at the U.S. Steel Building now the USX Building, and I would sit there at this church and say, "God, are You here, aren't You here? Are You real or aren't You real?" And after sitting there for about six months one day I came to know that Jesus Christ was alive and He was real. I remember looking at Him and saying, "Jesus I will do anything You want. Just tell me anything that You want." And at seventeen years old He told me to be a priest. And now I am 50, I am old, and all of these years it is all because I came to know that Christ was alive. He was real.

So the question is for you first of all, do you know that Christ is real? Is this just going through the motions of something? I am a cultural person. I go to Mass of Christmas and Easter. Or is this a real thing for you? Do you know it? Because, until you know it, let me give you a hint, you will never truly be at peace. You will be afraid of getting sick, you will be afraid of losing your job, you will be afraid of dying, you will be afraid. You will have all of this anxiety. You won't know what it is so you will drink a little more, you will smoke a little stuff to make yourself feel better. You will sit there and think why am I such a mess inside? Because you haven't built your life on anything except for sand which can be taken away. So what I would encourage you to do this Easter, these times of the days of Easter, that you would decide that you are going to spend time with the resurrected Lord. And the great way to do that in Erie is almost all the church's are open every day. Our church is open from 6 in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And when this church is not open you can go next door and spend time in the adoration chapel, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. So I challenge you to know the resurrected Lord by spending time with Him. Say, "Jesus if you are real I want to know you," if not then walk away. Just don't go through the motions. Come to know that He is real, first thing.

The second thing I would encourage you to do is meditate on the resurrection. So for those of you who say the rosary, hopefully all of you, I would encourage you, not tell you, I would just encourage you that maybe something different for this Easter season that every day you meditate on the resurrection of Christ. You meditate on the Glorious Mysteries so we can be people that find balance in our life. That just don't focus on this valley of tears, but focus on the resurrection. Why, because one of the saints said, "all the way to heaven is heaven because He said, "I am the way." When you and I come to know this risen Lord and we fully surrender ourselves to Him we can start to experience heaven on earth. We can start now to experience the resurrection because Christ, who is alive, lives inside of us. But again it is going to take time to meditate on that. You let the word of God, that has power, and mediate on that word so God can become fully alive in you.

I would also encourage you to truly be a person who lives life. And one of the ways you can do that is maybe some of the things you did give up for Lent you don't do it, you do the opposite for Easter

unless it is sin. If you gave up sin you don't sin on Easter. But again let's say you gave up chocolate, well then everyday for Easter have a piece of chocolate. And rejoice in that reality. Don't do it for yourself to indulge. Do it so you can be fully alive in Christ. Christ wants you to have life. Don't eat a box of chocolate. One piece and enjoy that one piece. Rejoice in that. Rejoice in life so when you do something like that this is what I would encourage you to do this Easter season - that every day you praise God for something good in your life. Instead of looking at what is going wrong and we all have it, there is always something good in your life. So for these next days of Easter everyday you sit there and you write a list, you might even put it on the calendar, one thing you want to give God praise for this day, that you are glad that you are alive today and not in the ground; that every day of our life that there is a day to rejoice because Christ is alive and you and I will live forever. So we start thanking Him for the little things. I could see, thank you Lord. I could talk, thank you Lord. I could listen, thank you Lord. I could eat, thank you Lord. You start praising God this Easter Season for all the things that go right in your life. To rejoice in your life instead of just focusing on just what goes wrong in your life, to rejoice in it. Spend some time like Jesus did. Right after the death when they were sitting there, they came together, and the way most people experience Christ was in community. In fact in Acts, Chapter 2 it says the dedicated themselves to the communal life. So often Lent becomes that which we only focus on ourselves. It can become a very selfish act. I gave up Pepsi for Lent. I gave up chocolate for Lent. We are focusing on us and what we have given up. Well, for Easter let's do things for the community. Let's enjoy our family time. Let's sit there and enjoy our friends. Let's take walks at the Peninsula with our friends that we haven't seen in awhile. Call them up and say come for a walk with me. Let's do something to rejoice that Christ is alive in the community.

And finally one of the greatest things that when Jesus looked at Peter after the resurrection and He says, "Peter, son of John, do you love Me?" Now this is of course after Peter denied Christ three times. He says, "Do you love me more than these?" He says, "Yes Lord. You know that I love You." And what did Jesus tell Peter to do? "Feed My Sheep. Feed My Lambs. Feed My Sheep." He told Peter, "Peter do you love Me and if you do, if you know that I am alive, then I want you to take care of others." So maybe one of the things we can do for the Easter Season is that we dedicate our lives to something type of service. That we do as I have talked many times when I do missions that you purposely, that you make it a specific work that this is what I am going to do. Every day I am going to commit one unselfish act, at least one unselfish act. Hopefully you start with your family. Oh my. The wives are saying, "Oh will you please start with that one" to their husbands. One unselfish act a day to show that if you are in love with Jesus, if you know that Christ is alive, the way you live that, the way that you prove that you love Him is by feeding others. And the way that we can feed others is by serving them.

So this Easter Season as we begin anew and we spend all these days of celebrating the resurrection, let's spend time with Christ in His resurrected form. Let's get to know Him by spending time with Him. Let's be people who really rejoice in the little things that God gives us. Let us be people who sit there and spend time the community. And let us be people who serve the way Christ came to serve. And if you start doing that you are going to start becoming a resurrection person, you will start living. You are an alleluia from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. You got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.