

Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy. MMXIX

The Lord has truly risen, Alleluia – This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia



Why continue our “Lenten Journey” into Eastertide?

It has always been easier to identify with Lent and Holy Week than with Easter. Fasting, Lenten exercises, entering into the passion of Our Lord are more understandable to us since we know suffering, we know difficulty – we know death. This is why very few artists can tackle true joy and fulfilment – it is that much harder – tragedy is that bit easier. But the period of Easter is of hugh significance and it would be as much a mistake not to take advantage of this Liturgical season than if we had ignored Lent. Why? In a nutshell because as St. Paul said if Christ had not risen, our faith would be in vain. Over the next seven weeks we shall try to meditate upon the significance of Easter.

How does the Church liturgically mark this season?

First and most importantly, the Easter Octave. Easter Sunday is not the last day of the week, nor the first of a new week, it is an “eighth day” which symbolises that Easter Sunday is somehow outside of time, it is mysterious – it draws our mind to the future bliss awaiting us in heaven; just as Christ’s resurrection is so intimate that we have no account of it. Moreover, the Church gives us an octave (8 days) of Easter Sundays to emphasize the point which is why Liturgically each day is celebrated as a Sunday. White is worn, the Gloria is sung, the antiphon “This is the day that the Lord has made” replaces the responsories in the office and the Paschal Sequence – although not obligatory – can/should be said during the mass. Easter Water can be blessed at the Sunday mass and sprinkled over the people. The Church also reminds us that we are celebrating baptism conferred on the catechumens at the Easter vigil – we continually in this period give thanks for this new life in the Church. There is much else that marks out this season making it so beautiful and rich, truly a time of joy. If you are able get your house blessed with the Easter water.

What is the symbolism of the fifty days?

The period from Easter to the Ascension is forty days – that mysterious biblical time that we have noted. But from Easter to Pentecost is fifty days because fifty is the number associated with the solemn jubilee. Every fifty years the Israelites had to forgive debts, offenses, release slaves etc – it was a time of rejoicing – a clean slate. Our jubilee is greater and will be concluded with the coming of the Holy Spirit who will give us the knowledge of all the Jesus taught and the power to carry it out. We could also look at it as seven weeks of seven days – the Hebrew word for seven means oath – thus we have a solemn swearing of an oath and Pentecost like Easter is a mysterious completion – of time but out or time.

How do the readings at Mass mark this special time?

During Eastertide all the readings are taken from the New Testament. During the octave we heard the confession of faith in Our Lord's resurrection from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel dealt with the different resurrection appearances of Our Lord. It is a rich season and the Sunday liturgies concentrate on passages that emphasise the significance of Jesus' rising from the dead?

Does Easter have particular practices for us as Lent did?

One of the mistakes that we can make if we are not careful is to assume that in Lent we did all the hard work, now we can relax, "kick back" and enjoy the festivity. We have "done" Lent and we can wait a while before it comes around again. Big mistake. Indeed the Church gives us a careful warning on Easter Sunday itself: we are to purge out the old leaven (sin, old way of life) since we can hardly participate in this festival with it (I Cor 5:7) Thus, our endeavours to lead a spiritual life are now redoubled because we have been redeemed. Lent was a time of preparation for our redemption and new life, Eastertide is living that life. However, I would add something very important: namely, the mode in which we live our lives is different. Lent was a time for penance due to our sins and fallen nature – hence we fasted and did penance; Easter is a time for festivity and joy since the mission has been accomplished. We really must feast for the fifty days. Therefore, our motivation to continue to improve our lives is now one of joy and gratitude. Not to feast or to appreciate the season is just as bad as not making any effort in Lent. After being given such a gift and one which cost such a price – as we saw during the Triduum – who would not feel uplifted in trying to live up to it. Lastly, we must remember that there are special graces to help us during this period – namely the grace of contact with the risen Christ.

What is the relationship between the passion and Easter Sunday?

Often, we can make the mistake of separating these two. The best way to look at them is to see the Triduum and Easter Sunday as one event – they cannot really be separated. The passion without the resurrection would make not sense since it is the goal which Christ kept in mind during his suffering. The Paschal Mystery – and we use this term as much for Easter as for Lent – is the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Our Lord.

Why don't I feel joyful during Easter – life still seems to have its difficulties and suffering?

We need to distinguish two things here: firstly, regardless of the Easter season life's trials and difficulties continue since our life is still in the journey to the Father – we have yet to complete our Passover although it has definitively been accomplished; hence, there is bereavement, sorrow etc and thus Eastertide can be a time of sadness. However, the spiritual joy regardless of this should be there. Why? Because if we enter into the mystery of the Easter season, regardless of our life's particular difficulties, Christ has indeed risen. He has conquered and in him, we too have risen and we too have conquered. Therefore, as St. Augustine says even the sorrow that comes our way during this season should not have an effect on this tremendous joy that is ours. This may seem strange but nevertheless it is profoundly true that our human sorrow physical, emotional or spiritual is tempered and difficult as it sounds must not distract us totally from the season. This is why the Church in her funeral rites during this season changes the readings.

This period of forty days to his Ascension, Christ taught the apostles. Let us likewise be open to his teaching, preparing for his Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

1. St. Paul wrote to the Colossians 3:1 to seek the things above. Has Easter made us more deeply aware of living spiritual lives so as to draw closer to the risen Christ?
2. Are we vigilant? Do we endeavour to make sure that the materialism of this world does not blind our spiritual senses?
3. Are we appreciative of the gift of baptism? Do we try to live the new life that it gave us?
4. Some interesting Scripture passages : Firstly, three books are very important: The First Letter of Saint Peter, the First letter of Saint John and the book of Revelation. The first two are not long and I would really encourage people to read them both. Why? They contain the essence of what Jesus IS, what he taught, what is death and resurrection meant and how we should live our lives. In detail look at Colossians 2:6-4:6 especially 3:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. We shall be looking at these during Eastertide.

God bless and may He give us spiritual joy and hope after his conquest of death and sin.



Father Dominic O'Connor