

Alleluia! Happy Easter to everyone! Lent is over. Deacon Corey and I can drink Cokes again!

We're here to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, because it makes a difference. It's totally illogical, it's unnatural. Our faith in the Resurrection rests on circumstantial evidence, on 11 witnesses: the remaining apostles.

These 11 fearful, cowardly men, who abandoned Jesus and even denied him, who had locked themselves in the Upper Room, were abruptly transformed into fearless men, who willingly faced gruesome deaths without any concern – most by crucifixion, like Jesus; a couple were beheaded; one was skinned alive; one was clubbed to death; another hacked to death. Their attitude was: bring it on!

That's because they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, and Jesus promised them he was only the first resurrection, that they all would enjoy the same experience, that they would live with him forever. They knew death was not the end.

I cannot believe that 11 men could conspire to tell a lie. Who dies for a lie? Someone would have cracked when the executioner stepped forward. These apostles saw Jesus risen from the dead. They would go forward, unabashedly proclaiming the Resurrection, that death no longer had the last word.

We live in a broken world. Human pride causes it, egos that have to save face and plow ahead no matter what the consequences. Human selfishness causes it, when we want something and are determined to get it and we don't care how it affects other people.

St. Paul wrote that these and all other sins are signs of a broken world, and that the ultimate sign of sin is death. This is not how it's supposed to be. We're not supposed to lose loved ones that way. That's why the apostles and all Christians afterwards have Good News for people: sin and death are not the end. If we hang onto Jesus's coattails, if we live believing he saves us, we will be raised with him to eternal life. The Resurrection gives us a whole new outlook. It gives us confidence to face any evil that comes our way: frustrations, disappointments, humiliation, betrayal, rejection, setbacks, losses, fears, illness, disability. None of those things have the last word! We keep on living, because we know we keep on living.

This is one of the reasons Jesus died on the cross. Could our Creator, the Father, have just said: I forgive all of you rebellious, sinful human beings? He could have, but that would have trivialized the cumulative sins of history. We would have taken that forgiveness for granted.

Instead, God takes human beings where they're at, what they'll understand. And what they understood then were sacrifices. When they took a life, they received life, and made peace with their god. Now who or what could be sacrificed to make up for all the sins of time? Only God himself could do that. That's why Christmas happened. The Son of God took on human skin so he could be the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of the world. And with the taking of his human life, we could receive a share in his divine life, his resurrected life, eternal life with God.

This is why I want to be close to Jesus Christ, to have a deeper relationship with him, why I respect his limits, and why I worship with others every week, to get support for my relationship with Christ. Because without that, I lose touch, and I don't want to lose touch. Our pace of life and the distractions of our lives keep Jesus on the backburner without that support. We gather weekly to remember the Resurrection and where we're going.

I have so much to be thankful for, and you do, too. Rejoice in the Good News of the Resurrection! Hang in there with Jesus, because then, no matter what, all things will pass — except our Resurrection and eternal life with God. Choose his life!

Fr. John Ozella, Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday, April 20/21, 2019