

Easter-A

April 9, 2023

St. Patrick's

“The angel said to the women: ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised...Then, go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead...’”

I’ve tossed around in my mind and heart varied ways of preaching for this holiest, most jubilant day of the year. None of them fit. Hopefully led by the Holy Spirit, it settled within me: This is my last Easter Sunday with you here at St. Patrick’s. Why don’t I share with you *why I believe* in the angel’s message: **“Christ has been raised from the dead”**? I think you need to hear that from your pastor.

Recently I’ve faced death closely. Eight days ago, I presided at the funeral of my second cousin, shot and killed as he went to his car to pick up his daughter from work. Some 800 people were at the funeral, as there were at the funeral for his blood brother, also murdered, seven months earlier.

The funeral was on April 1st. I looked out at the hundreds of people, and I told them candidly. It was April Fool’s Day, and I have a hunch that many folks look at Easter Sunday as *our* April Fool’s Day. We haven’t *seen* that Risen Jesus as did those women that first Easter Sunday. Is it just a wish? Or, worse—an April Fool’s joke?

Each of us has our own unique way to faith. Here’s mine.

Growing up within my family, our faith was part of who we were. Our parents, our maternal grandmother, and the pastor of my home parish, Little Flower, Father Joseph Leppert (who was one of the five white clergy in the civil rights movement from the beginning), showed a living faith.

My faith didn’t become personal until I was in my early 20s. In theology school, my spiritual director asked if I wanted to make the “Spiritual Exercises.” I didn’t know what he was talking about. They are at the heart of the Jesuit spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola in the 16th century. My director led me through these “Exercises” for eighteen months.

Late every night I would go to a small chapel in the seminary basement. It had green chairs (I should have known I would end up at St. Patrick’s!). The

“Exercises” called for an hour of prayer daily. Over time, following the pattern St. Ignatius encouraged, Jesus became alive for me. It was not just a “head” thing. I *experienced* Jesus’ love for me. More than that, I felt that Jesus *is* risen, vibrantly alive within me and in the world. And I sensed that tug within, Jesus calling me to be his disciple.

In my years of ministry, I’ve also experienced Jesus alive within a whole lot of people—within *you*, sometimes in surprising ways. Ah, yes, I—we!—have also had our share of bruises and setbacks and sin. But his risen life prevails!

Each morning I have my quiet time, sitting in my grandmother’s rocking chair, looking out at our bell tower and toward the East. On Sundays, it’s before sunrise, and the skyline starts showing traces of pink. From the East comes our “Dayspring who never sets,” the Risen Jesus. That’s how we get the name “*Easter*.”

On those early Sunday mornings, often I remember all those who have gone before us, in St. Patrick’s history, and through the centuries. I marvel at the words and gestures we celebrate on Easter and each Sunday. They are full of power, hope and love! At times, though, I wonder if they are just an April Fool’s joke. Yes, at times I don’t *feel* God. But I choose to believe—even with a feeble faith.

That’s why we need each other—on Easter Sunday, for sure, but also in the ordinary times, Sunday by Sunday. Some of us, right now, are ecstatically filled with joy in Jesus’ life and love. Others of us, barely getting by. We need to lean on each other.

This Good Friday many of us made the three-mile Way of the Cross through our neighborhood. It was a beautiful experience for me. During the walk, 7-year-old Lena and 4-year-old Clara each held my hand; at times, both together. Almost at the end of our walk, we were at the Ida B. Wells monument at the Beale Street corner, a block away from St. Patrick’s. We were sitting down for a moment. I asked Clara to turn around and I pointed to here. Clara said to me, “That’s *our* church!”

Clara didn’t call it “*my* church.” Insightfully she called it “*our* church.” St. Patrick’s: we’re in this together. That’s why I love our custom of holding hands as we sing jubilantly the “Our Father.” Holding onto each other, some with a faith-on-fire, others “just making it.” With Jesus alive within us and among us, we can proclaim boldly, as did the angel: “**Christ has been raised from the dead!**”

And let the church shout out, “Alleluia!”

