

April 8, 2007

Easter Sunday

Jesus is risen, He is risen indeed! Jesus is risen, He is risen indeed! Jesus is risen, He is risen indeed! This is the proclamation of the early Church. The early Church, that is the way they would greet each other with that proclamation “Jesus is risen...” and they would respond “He is risen indeed.” That was the number one thing that they proclaimed – that Christ was not dead, but He is alive. But what has to happen, is like St. Augustine said almost 2,000 years ago – not quite, but 1800 hundred years ago – St. Augustine said “we are an Easter people.” You know, in the early Church, it was forbidden to kneel at Mass. Everybody stood – why? Because we are an Easter people, huh? Now as the years developed we started kneeling and different things and for good reasons, but so often we Catholics are more Lenten people than we are Easter people. We like to suffer – we like to focus on the crucifix. We like to come to Fr. Larry’s Passion Talk and feel guilty about it, huh? We like that stuff! And what happens is we become these people that focus on death and dying instead of being alive, and the early Church said that isn’t what we are called to be! And so we have to go back to the early Church to remind us who we are called to be. We are called to be Easter people. Now, what is an Easter person? An Easter person is – as St. Augustine says “an Alleluia from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet.” We elude Alleluia! And the only way that can happen is when we finally – we don’t just sit there and say “oh yeah, I’m here...because it is Easter and I believe...” Whoa! Are you excited that you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? Do you think that’s a great thing? Yeah – isn’t that great! Yeah? The devil believes it too, so what! He believes that He rose from the dead – he knows that He rose from the dead. So, you have nothing over Satan! Isn’t that a terrible thing to say to a bunch of people on Sunday? “Thank you Father for making me feel guilty!” “You’re welcome!” But do you get this? It isn’t enough just to believe! It’s just not even close to enough!! But that is what most people get. That’s why you can tell these people because there is not smile on their face – they are just here...“oh dear, why did I come to this Mass with Fr. Larry? Fr. Michael would have been much easier on Easter Sunday.” Yeah, I know – but you got me! Tee Hee – poor people! But don’t you see – there has to be...what happens is, for us to be an Easter People, we have to be instead of debating “I wonder if Christ rose from the dead...” Let’s talk about it. There are different accounts in the scriptures. All that is meaningless – we have to prove Christ is alive, because He lives in us. I often have used, throughout the years, Msgr. Peterson as my example of the reason I know God exists, because his very being reveals to me and anybody that knows him that Jesus Christ is not dead – He is alive – just look inside his eyes. But that is what must happen in all of us! You know we can’t just go through the motions of going to church and trying to be a good person – it is not enough! We have to let Jesus Christ live His life through us in such a way that when people look at us they no longer see us, but they see Jesus the Christ alive inside of us. Now, how is this going to happen? Now the way this is going to happen, first of all for us to become Easter people is that we have to die to sin, and that is what all of Lent is about, and we talked a little bit about that last night. But somewhere in my life I have to stop playing this game with Jesus. “Ok Jesus I will keep half my foot in the world and in my sin and living life my way, but I will keep the other half, just a little

part, just in case this stuff is real. I don't want to go to hell. So, I'm going to sit there and live like this." And when you live like this, of course, you never have peace. Never! You go to bed at night and you think "oh, I hope I don't die tonight," or "how come I don't have peace," or "I had a lot of fun today, but I am still empty inside." Why? Because we haven't dealt with sin. We still try to let Christ live inside of us – Christ cannot live inside of you unless you are dead to sin. He can't. And when I say dead to sin – it doesn't mean that you are sinless – that means that sin no longer has power over you. That means you are not consistently walking in sin. You are not on purpose saying "yeah, I'm going to blow off Mass, yeah, I'm going to have sex, yeah, I'm going to get drunk, because it's the way I want to live my life!" Well, Christ isn't alive in you, because you have chosen to live a life of sin. God cannot exist in a life of sin. So what you have to do to be a resurrected person is repent of that. "Lord, I am done with this life of sin, because the only thing it does is kill me! I want to live Jesus. And so I repent of that. Now Jesus you know how hard it is for me. You know how weak I am. You know how I keep falling, so Jesus, I can't do this, but you are alive. And when I got baptized, you lived in me, so take total control – deal with the sin in my life." You have to give Christ permission to deal with sin in your life – first of all. The second thing that happens if we want to be people who have this Easter joy – we have to have a lively faith. Now what a living and lively faith is a faith that goes beyond going through the motions. Now again, I say this everywhere I am at – when I do Missions, you know all around the United States this last year – I have been on the road a lot. But you look out at the people, and people just don't look happy. Even as I look at some of you on this Easter Sunday, when we proclaim the resurrection of Christ, where is the joy – that somewhere inside of us we have to live in such a way, that I am an alleluia – that means I am a person of praise, and the way to be this alleluia person is instead of saying what is always wrong with the world, and looking at what's wrong with my pastor, what's wrong with my husband, what's wrong with my wife, what's wrong with the Church, what's wrong with Bush, what's wrong with this one and we go along in this negative "pansyness" and we start focusing on what is right – we start praising God for everything He has given us. And then we start praising God we get lifted up into Christ! And now, when that starts happening, we can have this living faith! And a living faith is a faith that wants to spend time with the person that he loves or she loves. You can always tell a person who has great faith and a person who doesn't. A person who has great faith spends a lot of time in prayer because they are in love. If prayer is a burden – if I ask you "do you pray every day" and you say to me "oh, I try Father..." you're not in love. If you have to try to pray – which is the most important thing we do – it is more important than eating – it is where I am with the person I love! Why would we have to "try" to be with the person we love? When we have 24 hours a day – we have the same amount of time – and everybody gives me this "well Father, I am very busy..." don't give me that garbage! It is a matter of priority – you always spend time with the ones you love! Are you in love with Jesus Christ? Are you in love with Him? Then this living faith makes you and I want to spend time with Him. And so I sit there I have dealt with my sin – and I have dealt with it and let Jesus take control of that – the next thing is I spend time with the one I love. And the more I spend time with the one I love, the more I become like the one I love. He who is alive – He who is joyful makes me alive and makes me joyful. And the third thing that has to happen for us to become Easter people – is we become a people filled with a generous spirit of love and service.

Again, to us the example of Fr. Peterson – I used to live with Fr. Peterson before I got ordained years ago – he was the pastor of St. Theresa’s in Union City. Now Pete – I never met a man like him and I could never be as generous as him because in reality he used to have the rectory open 24 hours a day – the locks were never locked on the door. There would be people – street people that could come in and out of the rectory at any time. His own bedroom – he didn’t even have his own bedroom – he had a thin bed, up against the wall, another bed there, and two mattresses on the floor for street people and when I was there, I slept on the living room couch. And as I slept on the living room couch, there would be at least 15 people in the house, on the floor. And one night I wake up in the middle of the night because I felt someone staring at me. And as I felt someone staring at me, there is this guy sitting in the chair, and I said “who are you?” And he said “don’t worry about it – go back to sleep.” “Ok – no...wait! Who are you?” But this is the type of life that this man lives! That he lives a life of generosity! Now you and me – if we are going to be a people who let Christ live inside of us – you can tell that because we have a generous heart. People who don’t know that Christ is alive in them – they are always trying to take care of themselves, so they live this little selfish life – “oh, I have to take care of me and my money and make sure I am healthy and I have to make sure...me, me, me, me!” Well, it’s going to kill you! When you finally let Jesus live inside of you, you have this generosity. Now if you are married with kids, you better not let street people come into your house! That is not the reality! But, you begin with your family. You live a life of generous service to your wife, to your children, to your parents. You live this life of generosity. You live a life where you give service to the world instead of being a taker from the world. You see, to believe in this resurrected Christ will cost you your life. Its not going to cost you “oh, yeah, I believe because I’m here at Mass on Sunday at Easter, aren’t you excited Father.” Not particularly. Are you alive in Jesus, that’s the question? When people look at you and me, do they know that Jesus Christ is alive, because they can look into our eyes and sees – Christ isn’t dead, He is alive. And if you want this to happen, you are going to have to die to sin – you are going to have to live in this faith with Christ where you let Him live inside of you and you are going to have to live a life of generosity- prayer and generosity. And today, at this Mass, like we always do at the Masses at Christmas and Easter, I’ll give you the opportunity after Communion. After Jesus Christ gives His life for you and me in the Eucharist, then we look back at Him and say “ok, Lord...” those who want “I give my life to you this Easter Sunday. Jesus I want to deal with my sin, I want to spend time with you in prayer. I want to live a life of generosity by you now Jesus taking full charge of my life. You resurrect inside of me and bring me to life.” And if you and I do that today, this day will be greatest day and the most important day of our lives. But it is up to you and me today – not just to believe it, but to live it. That’s what Easter is about. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.