

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 29, 2011

My theme for this homily does not derive directly from the biblical readings just proclaimed to you. It takes its point from what we pray in the Easter Preface. We praise God “with greater joy than ever” and “the joy of the resurrection renews the whole world.” Any serious attempt to make Easter joy real, has to begin with the resurrection of Jesus. Here is where joy is rooted.

St. Paul saw this clearly, stated it shockingly: “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” – empty, without content, without basis, without truth. If Christ is not alive, gloriously alive, go home right now. But the fact is, Jesus is alive. Remember that marvelous closing scene in the musical *Godspell*? Like the apostles and Mary Magdalene running around the audience, we too can shout for joy, “He’s alive! He’s alive!”

This leads directly into my next point: my own resurrection. I am not speaking simply or primarily of the resurrection that awaits us after death. I suggest that we have to probe deeper. Today’s Easter Preface points the way to more profound understanding. Why? Because

In Christ a new age has dawned,  
the long reign of sin is ended,  
a broken world has been renewed,  
and woman and man are once again made whole.

Not that sin is a thing of the past. Rather, sin no longer reigns like a tyrant over us. We are not slaves of sin. If we sin, we do so freely. If we are sorry, we are forgiven. Not that brokenness is utterly healed. Rather that with the grace of Christ we need no longer be torn within. Then with Christ, St. Paul exclaims: “Who will rescue me from this doomed body? Thank God! It is done through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

On a more positive note, mull over Jesus' promise in today's Gospel: "Because I have life, you also will have life." The reason why Jesus came was, in his own words, "That you may have life and have life to the full." This is what it means to be alive in Christ. This is what it means for man and woman to be "once again made whole." Your flesh and your spirit are alive with the life of the risen Christ. This is not romantic poetry. This is Gospel truth. Little wonder Paul could cry, "If you are in Christ, you are a new creature." If you and I could only be less embarrassed about our feelings, we might well race around the streets of downtown Seattle shouting not simply "*He's alive!*" but "*I'm alive! I'm alive!*"

And so to conclude. What obstacles stand in the way of such deeply felt Christian joy? Some awfully powerful ones. Try telling a poor mother to rejoice as she tries to feed her hungry child. Try Easter joy on 36 million refugees across the world. Try selling Easter joy to frustrated Catholics: marriage laws, liturgies that fail to inspire, dull homilies, an all-male priesthood, pastoral insensitivity.

I don't come to you with answers. I do know that the joy Jesus promised to his disciples and to us, "You have sorrow now. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." I can add only one suggestion more. One experiences joy only when I turn outward, as Jesus did – turn to others, especially the less fortunate images of Christ who experience far more of his crucifixion than of his resurrection. Joy returns when I can bring a smile to a child who has rarely felt love, bring hope to one of the downtrodden who see no future. Or just be reasonably human to someone I don't especially like.

Dear parishioners. Besides the traditional taxes and death, there are two other realities of which we can be certain. (1) God will always surprise us. (2) God will always be there – a Father or Mother who shaped us for joy. A Jesus who died that we might experience his joy. And a Holy Spirit who is the dynamism within us that engenders joy.

Before Easter ends, resolve that it will never end for you. Because you are alive. Alive with the life of Christ. Let's *celebrate* that joy now by sharing joyously in the central act of our worship: God with us in our gathering, Jesus alive on our table, in our hands, on our tongues, in our hearts.