

**EASTER SUNDAY - (A)** (9:30am & 6:00pm) **Son rise, Son set!**

Is there anything more beautiful than seeing a sunrise? The aurora begins and the sun is still not visible, but the anticipation increases in our body as we await the coming of the sun. More and more light and more and more excitement! Then, voile, the orb of the sun appears, and all the earth is filled with light. The sun has risen and a new day begun.

Now let us replace the word S-U-N with the word S-O-N, and see what it does to us. “Is there anything more beautiful than seeing a SON-rise?” The aurora begins with the stone being moved, and the Son is still not visible to the soldiers guarding the tomb. More and more light and more and more excitement! Then, voile, the Son appears, and all are blinded by the light. The Son has risen and a new day has begun.

There is no more frightening thought to people than the thought of their death. Even people who believe in life-after-death become fearful as the day approaches. Kenny Chesney, a country singer, sings a song that everyone can identify with. His refrain goes, “Everybody wanna go to heaven: Halleluiah, let me hear you shout; everybody wanna go to heaven; but nobody wanna go now.” Who here is ready to be inscribed in our book of the dead? Raise your hands. I thought so. See? Why?

Because deep in our hearts we do not believe? If death is the gate leading to eternity, and we’ve lived the way we want to be remembered, then why are we afraid to face the moment of death? If fear exists, examine it, because fear is not of God. God’s light casts out the fear of the dark, like a light-switch in a dark room makes us feel secure. That is what Mary Magdalene felt when Jesus turned on the light by saying her name, “Mary.” That opened her blind eyes to the reality of Christ’s light.

I was 30 years old and a Jesuit novice in 1980. All novices make the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of their novitiate. It is a retreat that lasts 30 days. The 1<sup>st</sup> week deals with the reality of sin

and grace in our lives. We must eventually accept that we are sinners called to follow Jesus behind the banner of his love. I was having an incredibly tough time accepting my sinfulness. I was sure God wouldn't forgive me. Then my director had me do the classic meditation Ignatius designed for people like me: I had to meditate on my death.

I was to imagine having died. I was to answer, "Who is there? What has happened?" Within seconds, I saw Jesus there, embracing me just as I was, and all I could do is melt in his arms like Mary tried to do, and I cried and cried like Peter did. Nothing else mattered but Jesus' embrace. I knew I was forgiven. I no longer feared death. I could do the next 3 weeks of the retreat, walking with Jesus, suffering with Jesus and rising with Jesus as we are here, right now, to do.

For years I've tried to help us get to the point where I was blessed to have: the point when we're free to stay and free to go. I am free to stay and give God my all in gratitude for having one more day to serve. I am free to go, for that means that I will be in an eternal embrace of love. Calvary proved it: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is meant for us all. So is, "Come, blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of time."

"For God so loved the world that God sent Jesus, not to condemn the world, but so that the world would be saved by his words." His words and actions are love incarnate. Let us celebrate our renewal of faith, the rekindling of hope, and the deepening of our love for God and each other by loving one another as we have been loved.

Let us recognize the one who calls us each by name, as he did with Mary, in the breaking of the bread. Let our "amen" at communion be to being more like Christ, who loves us just as we are, and so, in turn, we love as we have been loved. Then Christ's joy will be in us and our joy will be complete, for the lord is Risen, and his life goes on in us.