

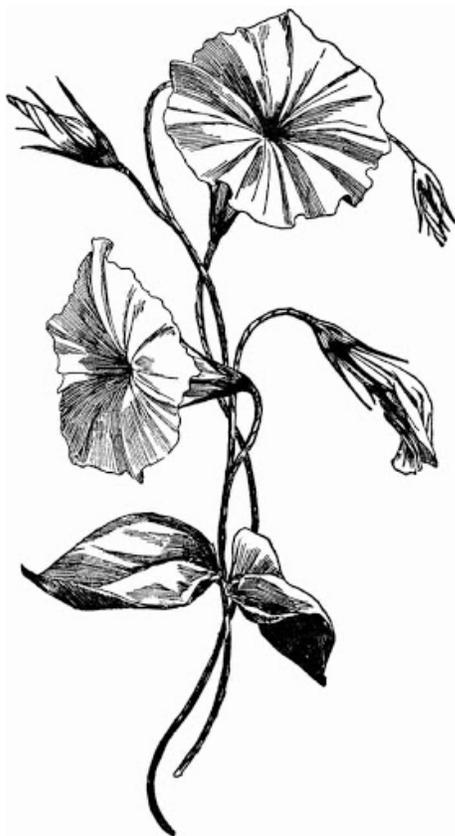
A Deeper Journey

REMEMBER: HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

*This week guest writer Nathan Gunn, ordained Catholic Deacon, offers us an invitation to celebrate Easter **Season**, the 40 days between Easter and Pentecost. Nathan also serves as the Initiatives Coordinator for the Northeast Atlantic Division in Young Life.*

Don't become still! Don't sit silent! Stand for a moment and shout, "He is RISEN!"
Imagine all of creation shouting back at you, "He is RISEN indeed!"

This ancient Christian greeting, sourced from the Easter exclamation from the Emmaus Road pilgrims (Luke 24:34) has been used for centuries by Christians to encourage one another about the *reality* and *implications* of the event of Easter. As we awake this morning, the world is changed. Death has been overcome! God has won! Life is eternal! Nothing will ever be the same!



However, if we don't linger here, if we just go into another normal week of work and activity, we run the risk that the power and richness of Easter Sunday could be relegated to a day, a moment, a memory. If we don't pause here and consider all that is being offered to us, we miss out on the deepest treasures:

- an encounter with the transforming presence of our Resurrected Lord
- a personal invitation to transformation
- time to ponder the wonder of the Kingdom of God on earth
- and finally – the opportunity to receive the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

If we spend today, Easter Monday, simply finishing the jelly beans and sneaking one last Cadbury egg, then we minimize the depth and reality of what is transpiring. Look at the Creation around you! Spring has come! Life is breaking through the earth! Thankfully, we don't need to move on. The Gospels have given us rich companions and the Church has given us the *Season* of Easter.

The season of Easter is centered around the majesty of Easter Sunday. This season is rooted in the 40 days that the women and Apostles spent with the resurrected Jesus until His Ascension and the pouring out of His Spirit at the Feast of Pentecost. While Lent and its disciplines are *preparatory* for Jesus's passion and suffering, Easter and its invitation is *participatory* in the life and power of the resurrection!

Both seasons are important in our formation as God's people, but as we think of this dynamic and our Young Life family, aren't we more naturally suited to be Easter people than Lenten people? Don't we yearn to live our lives and our have our ministry linked to the power of the Resurrected Jesus and His invitation to transformation? Wouldn't we all trade fasting for feasting?

Today we invite you to start an Easter journey together.



Remembering God's Goodness Together

What if we lingered in the wonder of the Empty Tomb for just a little longer? What if we checked in with the Apostles, locked away in fear in the Upper Room? What if we spent 40 days with the Resurrected Jesus as the early followers did? What if we watched Him ascend into Heaven? What if we waited and longed for the Holy Spirit for 10 days? What if we were there when the Holy Spirit came and reversed the age-old human curse from Babel?

The Season of Easter is a sincere invitation to participate in the transforming power and love of Jesus Christ the Son of God. We journeyed with Jesus through Lent and His passion and death, now what would happen if we journey with Him in His resurrection? Might we get a glimpse at what St. Paul meant when he wrote: "Now if we die with Christ, we believe that we will also *live with him*"? (Rom 6:8)

We will return tomorrow to the Empty Tomb, but for now, reflect for yourself: What might happen in your life if you encountered the Risen Jesus yourself today?

Remembering God's Goodness Together: Daily Engagement

Day 2 The Transformation Begins: Mary of Magdala (John 20:1-18)

The first recorded statement from Jesus on His day of conquering death for all of humanity was a humble one:

“Woman, why are you crying?”

The spirituality of the Easter season begins in a cemetery. We don't leap forward without remembering where we came from. Easter begins with death and loss and grief. We are all human; none of us will escape the gripping agony and pain associated with these experiences. Easter does not ignore them, and we can't either.

Mary's grief was well-founded. She loved Jesus. Her experience of Jesus' betrayal, suffering and death was not from a distance. Mary, like many of the women, did not have to imagine the grotesque and gruesome scenes at the cross. Unlike the apostles save John, she was *there*. In her grief, sorrow and trauma, the last insult – the theft of her Master's body-- was yet another chapter in a cascading story of disappointment, loss and despair.

Did you notice that Jesus did not overwhelm her? Remember, this is the Resurrected Jesus. This is the one who just conquered the grave. He has just proven to the world that He is the Logos, the Alpha and the Omega and

the Son of God. But rather than overwhelm her with His glory, Jesus once again “empties himself, making himself nothing” (Phil 2: 7). Even in the Resurrection, Jesus is humble because Jesus is unable to be anything but humble.



And so while Mary is living in a state of loss and confusion, Jesus cuts through her pain and sorrow with His Presence and humility. He simply states her name: “Mary”.

Has a sweeter word been spoken?

Today, on this second day of the Season of Easter, Jesus stands with you in your

sorrow. In your losses. In your grief. In your confusion. He asks you, “Why are you crying?”

Do you want to tell Jesus why you are crying? What would happen if you really let him know?

But don't get overwhelmed. As the pain and emotion may pour over you, finish the story: Jesus stands with you in complete humility and simply says your name.

Can you imagine it now?

For Mary, the Presence of Jesus was transformative. Easter was not an intellectual event nor a moment in history to record and preserve. Easter was not a memory or a set of proofs or

evidences. She hadn't developed the theology of St. Paul or even that of John. She didn't memorize the Apostles Creed.

For Mary, Easter was a transforming encounter with her best friend who had died and risen and who was and is and every more shall be the Son of God. In the face of His grand humility, Mary's grief and sorrow were transformed. Her confusion faded. Her heart leapt again and she began to cling to Jesus.

What about you?

***Day 3* Jesus transforms our fear (John 20:19-23)**

As we spend just a few more moments on the Easter narrative, we encounter the apostles on Sunday night. Even though they had heard the reports from Mary and Peter and John, how did the Apostles spend Easter Sunday?

They were locked inside the Upper Room in fear (John 20:19).

If we move on too quickly from the life-altering events of Easter, we too might be left with the Apostles, locking ourselves away in the prisons of our own fears. True, they had seen the empty tomb and heard stories, but they hadn't encountered the Risen Jesus.

This last season of our collective lives has been riddled with fear. On so many fronts and in so many arenas, fear has been driving decisions and fear has been peddled and trafficked with incredible ferocity. There would be great temptation in this moment to settle in, lock the door, ignore the reality of the power of Easter.

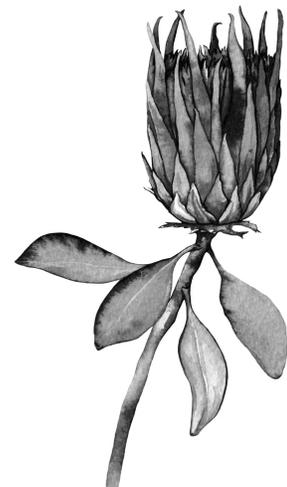
Thankfully – Jesus doesn't expect us to unlock the door of our own fears on our own. Instead,

“On the evening on that first day of the week...
Jesus came and stood among them and said ‘Peace be with you.’”

Where does courage come from? For us as followers of Christ, is courage in the face of obstacles and never foreseen challenges just a face we put on? Does this period of our journey just call for us to put on another Christian mask to pretend to be the person we think we ought to be? Is fortitude an attribute that we somehow self-generate in the face of gargantuan circumstances?

Not this year. This is too hard and too exhausting.

So is there an alternative?



What if the Resurrected Jesus, the One who overcame death, what if He arrived into the reality of our fear and our circumstances and what if He entered the room? What happens to the fear when the One who was Dead shows up Alive? But we have to stay here to change; we have to be in His Presence to be transformed. We have to linger with Him and His Reality to put those obstacles and challenges into their proper perspective.

When the doors opened, did the Apostles still have enemies? Legions.
When they emerged, did they still need to sneak around? For sure.
When they met together, were they still putting their lives on the line? Absolutely.

But what was different? Were they afraid anymore?

Spend time today sitting in the Presence of the One who swallowed Death and tell him what you are afraid of. Linger with Him in your own “locked” room and see what He has to say to you. He wants to offer His Peace to you. You do not have to move forward alone. In the Season of Easter, it is not about playing games, putting on faces, pretending to be brave.

This is about *participating* with the reality of the Resurrection, the actuality of the “life of the world to come.” Let the Risen Jesus come into your room. And be warned, He may not knock.

Day 4 Walking with the Shepherd-King

“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3)

Now that we’ve begun to become more accustomed to sitting in the Presence of the Risen Lord, we recall that this period extended for the disciples for 40 days. We get a small taste of what the experience must have been like from the Easter-day story of the two pilgrims who were leaving Jerusalem.

They were talking over all the events of the weekend when Jesus showed up in their midst. We might want to consider the fact that Jesus spends the bulk of His first day resurrected on a daylong mountainside hike with two disciples whom we had never met before. That encounter left the pilgrims completely transformed. That morning they had left Jerusalem discouraged and downcast, with their backs turned to the most significant event in human history. By that night they were running and skipping back to the City of David with hallelujahs on their lips! What had happened in the in-between time? Jesus had walked with them and “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24: 27).

Spending time with the Resurrected Jesus and learning from His voice is utterly transforming.

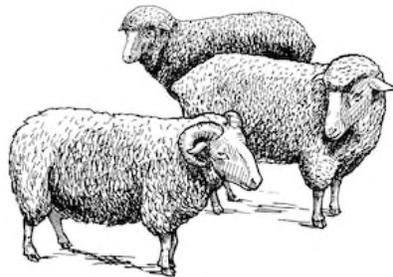
If a single afternoon hike could cause the “hearts to burn” of two weary pilgrims, imagine the impact of 40 days of the Risen Lord teaching the Apostles. We don’t enjoy the content of those teachings, but we know the characteristics of God’s Reign that Jesus had outlined before He had suffered:

God’s Kingdom is of extreme value. (Matt 13)
God’s Kingdom is mixed in with the world in which we live in. (Matt 13)
God’s Kingdom is for the poor and the poor in Spirit. (Matt 5 and Luke 6)
God’s Kingdom is received by those that are child-like. (Mark 10)
God’s Kingdom is proclaimed and it is Good News. (Mark 1)
God’s Kingdom is for the marginalized and forgotten. (Luke 14)
God’s Kingdom is found in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick and those imprisoned. (Matt 25)

The Season of Easter invites us to participate in the Kingdom of God anew. But we don’t participate alone. We work and serve alongside our King, who is also our Good Shepherd. On the backside of Good Friday, Jesus’s words from John 10 carry a new and profound weight: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” The relationship with our Shepherd-King takes on simple meaning when we hear John’s recollection of Jesus’ words in that chapter: “The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...He goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

Easter spirituality is about being transformed by the Presence of Jesus. We can see that change happening in two sullen people’s lives on Easter who heard a dynamic Old Testament topical Bible study on the Jewish Messiah. We see it again in the Apostles and the women who heard Jesus teach about His Kingdom for 40 days with the understanding that this King was dead and now alive. We are invited to hear His teachings in a fresh way through the voice of our Good Shepherd, who loved us so much that He gave Himself up for us.

We are more than four days out from the first Easter Sunday, and our souls may be downcast as we walk this long road, especially after this past year. But lift up your eyes, pilgrim. The Shepherd-King is with you and ready to warm your heart with His voice and words.



Day 5

Waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1)

As we consider the spirituality of this season, we recognize that Jesus was with His friends for 40 days after His death. The next great Feast Day for the Jews was coming at Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus was crucified during the Passover Feast. Within that structure, Jesus honored the 40 days prefiguring of other episodes in the salvation narrative and unexpectedly was “taken up before their very eyes” (Acts 1:9). As we look into the details of this pivotal moment, we can gain some footing on how to prepare for the Coming of the Holy Spirit.

First, Jesus instructs His Apostles to stay in Jerusalem. With the Pentecost feast, God would bring “the world” to them; they simply had to wait. Living the Resurrection means that sometimes we wait for the Holy Spirit and look for signs that God is moving.

Second, Jesus told them that they would receive the “gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4). The coming of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a pure grace – undeserved but transforming. We do not get to dictate the terms. The Holy Spirit coming at all is a gift to be received and cherished.

Third, the Apostles had hoped this was the moment that Jesus would restore Israel (Acts 1:6). Can we blame them? What could be better than Jesus the Messiah resurrected? Can you imagine the power and witness of Jesus walking back into Pilate’s courtyard or appearing again in front of Caiaphas? Don’t we all long for Jesus to simply

walk back in this moment and take back the Kingdom by force? What suggestions or recommendations are we giving Jesus right now? What hoped-for outcomes do we think might be better than the coming of the Holy Spirit?

Fourth, Jesus utterly transforms the question. He tells them, “YOU will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on YOU and YOU will be my witnesses...” Wait a second. The Apostles asked Jesus if HE was going to restore Israel and instead He told them, it was going to be about what THEY would do.

Whoa.

What if the gift of the Holy Spirit in your life is so that YOU can participate in Jesus’s plan to reconcile the world to His Father?

Fifth, Jesus is not interested in redeeming the nation of Israel that had its political capital in Jerusalem from its Roman oppressors. Instead, Jesus wanted His apostles to take His Kingdom to “Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Consider this – if the Son of God in the Risen Body of Jesus of Nazareth had wanted to sit on the either the Judean or Roman throne of power, He could have. He chose not to. Instead, He wanted something far grander and wider and deeper and longer. The Resurrected Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that knows no borders and is beyond the constraints of time. In which Kingdom are you called to serve?

What are we asking Jesus for in this Season of Easter? Do we want to receive the gift of His Spirit? Or are looking for something else?

Easter Spirituality ultimately moves us from death, grief and fear to life, joy and courage. We receive this transformation through the gift of His Spirit, which is coming at Pentecost. Circle that sixth Thursday after Easter. Join the Apostles in Jerusalem and place yourself in a posture of waiting expectantly for a gift from our self-revealing God. Will you be open? Will you be ready?



Day 6 Invitation to wonder, to community and to love.

The Season of Easter is full of wonder. The reality of the Resurrection is the question, “What if?”

We are living in the age after the Resurrection. The Incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ on earth is a past tense historical event and reality. We find the stories of His life in the Gospels and we trust those accounts. But “what if” He did raise from the dead and “what if” death is an entry point for all of us who know Him to live forever? Living in participation with the invitation of God’s Spirit is not something we will “get right” or “do better”. This is not another spiritual to-do list. Easter spirituality is something different.

Eugene Peterson tells us, “Without wonder, we approach spiritual formation as a self-help project. We employ techniques. We analyze gifts and potentialities. We set goals. We assess progress. Spiritual formation is reduced to cosmetics. Without wonder, the motivational energies in spiritual formation gets dominated by anxiety and guilt. Anxiety and guilt restrict; they close us in on ourselves.” (*Living the Resurrection*, p. 30).

This exhortation cuts right to the challenge of the Easter season: this is a time for encounter and gift. “What if” Jesus rose from the dead? What needs to change? What if you and those you care the most about are going to live forever? What space does that create today in your life?

What if that same Resurrected Jesus has sent His precious Holy Spirit – to you? To your community? “What if” anything is possible? What if Google doesn’t have *all* the answers?

The Apostles and those holy women in the early Chapters of Acts experienced this. And that wonder created something we all long for:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed his possessions were his own but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was upon them all. There was no needy persons among them.” (Acts 4:32-33)

Notice the centerpiece of their message: it was an Easter proclamation. These were people who were participating in the Resurrection of Jesus! And IF He was raised and IF they were going to follow Him, why worry about your material things? Why hoard and acquire and collect? For what? This was a community that properly understood the expression, “You will never see a U-Haul following a hearse.”

These people were caught up in the wonder of Jesus’ resurrection and it led to freedom, to generosity, to selfless power and to unity. Look at those words again: freedom, generosity, selfless power and unity. Are those lacking or in abundance in your own ministry?

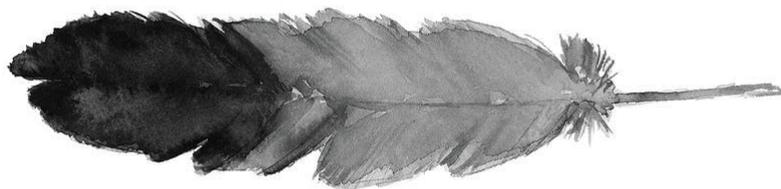
All this wonder ultimately draws us back to the words of Christ during His Passover teaching in John 15:11-12, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for one’s friends.” (John 15: 11-12).

What we are witnessing in the Acts community of believers are people who actually took Jesus up on this offer. Ask yourself today, who’s joy do you want inside you? Yours or His?

Jesus offers His joy! That is a wonder!! And how do we access it? How do we participate with His JOY?

We look with intentionality to lay down our lives for our friends. Why? Because we know that Our Father, the Father of Jesus, will pick us up every time. The joy of the invitation of the Easter season is to see our sufferings and sacrifices and trials with a new perspective, through the lens of *wonder*.

Can you allow yourself to ask, “What if?”



Day 7 Pentecost Sunday

OH THE SACRED WONDER OF PENTECOST!

How many of us have been dead in our faith because we haven't experienced this life in the Spirit?

We are called to live by the Spirit (Romans 8), but how can we live that way if we stop our Easter journey before Pentecost? Remember, the season of Easter is a seven-week journey of transformation.

We started at the tomb. We moved into the Upper Room. We have walked with Jesus and heard His teachings. We have seen the invitation to wonder and community and love. After 40 days of intimacy, we saw Him leave us and we have been waiting and praying. And now, after 10 more days:

BOOM!

We know they were "all together in one place" (Act 2:1) on the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost comes at a gathering. This is not a solitary experience. Get yourself into a church if you want a Pentecost experience. In the end, Pentecost is not just about you, but about us.

Remember, Luke uses the literary tool of simile to describe the events: "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind" and "what seemed to be tongues of fire". While the imagery is hazy, the impact is not. From here on out, it is the

Holy Spirit that will have the primacy in both the direction and the power of the Church. We cannot overestimate what it meant to these apostles in this time and in this place. As the Spirit descended, their lives began to be changed anew:

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:4)

*As the Spirit descended,
their lives began to be
changed anew.*

Luke employs a Greek word here: πίμπλημι (*pimplemi*) that we saw exclusively at the beginning of his Gospel.

The last two people Luke tells us that were "filled with the Holy Spirit" were Elisabeth and Zachariah. And what was the fruit of being "filled with the Holy Spirit?"

Elisabeth proclaimed: "Blessed are you (Mary) and blessed is the child you will bear!" (Lk 1: 42)

Zechariah prophesized the epic Canticle of Zechariah which finishes triumphantly: "to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk 1:79)

Can you see the power of this structure?

Elisabeth and Zechariah were filled with the Holy Spirit to *prophesy* about Jesus and His Kingdom.

The Apostles at Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit to *proclaim* Jesus and His Kingdom.

The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is proclamational. The Spirit is the root of our message. The Spirit is the power of the Gospel to transform lives. The Spirit is what allows people to say, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2: 12)

Oh Young Life family, this is so very, very important for us. St. Paul wrote about preaching with the Spirit from Pentecost: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Cor 2:5)

Do you see that clearly?

Could Paul have taught from his wisdom? Absolutely! Who is more learned than Paul?
Could Paul have shared with persuasive words? For sure! Who has a sharper mind than Paul?

But he doesn't. He is able to distinguish that his preaching, his message was a Spirit-filled message.

So what about us?

Does Pentecost give us a pass from preparation and Bible study and seminary classes and learning good theology? NO. In fact, it's the opposite. We need to work *with* the Spirit. We need to soften our own hearts to be *receptive* to the Spirit. We need to fine-tune our ears to *hear* the voice of the Spirit.

In the end, the Day of Pentecost is about God's Spirit doing what God's Spirit is going to do. Those present were just vessels, and the blessing was on the people who heard the message. As with Elisabeth and Zechariah, they were open vessels to God's Spirit and when they were filled, then they proclaimed.

So with us, may we too, by the grace of the Most Holy God, be vessels to be filled with His powerful Spirit to proclaim a message that a new generation can receive with wonder and conviction. Are you ready?





Come – oh Creator Spirit Blest

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
And in our hearts take up thy rest;
Come with thy grace and heav'nly aid
To fill the hearts which thou hast made,
To fill the hearts which thou hast made.

O Comforter, to thee we cry,
Thou heav'nly gift of God most high,
Thou fount of life, and fire of love,
And sweet anointing from above,
And sweet anointing from above.

O Holy Ghost, through thee alone
Know we the Father and the Son;
Be this our firm unchanging creed,
That thou dost from them both proceed,
That thou dost from them both proceed.

Praise we the Lord, Father and Son,
And Holy Spirit with them one;
And may the Son on us bestow
All gifts that from the Spirit flow,
All gifts that from the Spirit flow.

Rabanus Maurus (c. 776-856)