

From the Deacon's Desk

Security Workshop:

Last Tuesday Aaron Lloyd attended a workshop in Hemlock St. John XXIII Parish on Security Training for Places of Worship conducted by law enforcement and a member of the Critical Incident Management Group. In the months ahead, the Parish Pastoral Council will be looking at measures and creating a plan to make parishioners safe while at church. This action plan will involve all aspects of critical incidents including fires, tornados, and dangerous persons. Be assured that I take seriously the task of keeping everyone safe, especially our children and youth.

Whole Community Catechesis: Living, Dying, Rising

As we approach both Easter and springtime, people are more aware of the power of the Paschal Mystery – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If you think about it, our whole Jewish-Christian faith is based upon the idea that people can change over time, and that resurrection and transformation happen all around us all the time. Everything changes, from the seasons of the year to a little baby which grows into adulthood, to the newest computers which are outdated by newer computers each day.

Recently at a funeral vigil, the family wanted me to talk about the resurrection story of the widow's only son in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus says to the boy: "young man, I say to you rise!" At one point in my reflection, I mentioned that I believed in the literal big "R" resurrection of Jesus, because first I can name the small "r" resurrection stories in my own life.

Perhaps start thinking about your own everyday experiences of resurrection. I have no doubt you're had a myriad of them. Have you ever been stuck in life... a kind of little death, but out of nowhere you gain new insight, new motivation, and new perspective on living? In those moments we are hearing Jesus say to us "RISE," time to get up... stop being dead and start living again!

Have you ever been dead in an addiction, or dead in a relationship, and out of somewhere new life comes to you, and you experience a friendlier power at work in your life. Is that Jesus saying to you, "RISE!"?

Have you ever lost your home, or a job, or a pet, or something... someone you held onto dearly, and out of nowhere life started over for you? In those moments, Jesus has come close to us, and said the words which bring newness of life. We have all experienced his promise of resurrection, in many ways.

I have had so many small resurrection moments in my life that I have no difficulty believing in the big resurrection that God can bring about, both now and in the future. I've heard Jesus say those words to me, and I know Jesus has said those words to you too.

At our Whole Community Catechesis session we will talk about our resurrection moments, and look at the topic of death from a new perspective. No one wants to die, and yet, surprisingly, some positive results can come into our lives when the fact sinks in that we are all really going to die someday. I once remember reading a book by a psychologist who concluded that if there was no death, if everyday life was how it would be forever—and we could never leave—intense boredom would result. In a sense, life shrinks when death is denied. Freud for example believed that the temporary nature of life increases our enthusiasm for it. When the reality of death is denied, life becomes as shallow as flirtatious love, in which there are no expectations of consequences or commitment. Gold and diamonds are precious because their supply is limited.

Part of life's preciousness comes from the fact that our years are limited. Realizing that life is limited can act as a catalyst to plunge us into more authentic ways of living, and enhance our joy in the true living of life.

The authentic ways of living are those for which we are made—loving our families and others, living in the present, and appreciating the little things in life, like the smell of coffee in the morning, or the wind in our hair, or a cat sitting on our lap.

Recognizing that life is limited encourages us to live purposefully, to discover a task in life that has meaning for us, and to dedicate ourselves to life with all that is intense and good. In John's Gospel Jesus tells us: "I came

that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Some people think God wants us to tiptoe through life, sidestepping all its joys and challenges, and playing it safe. Some envision a bland God, who desires a bland life for us, followed by a bland heaven. A favorite quote of mine comes from St. Irenaeus in the 2nd Century who said: “The Glory of God is Human Beings Fully Alive!”

When we come more deeply to realize that our own lives are limited, wonderful things can happen. Have you ever noticed that people who have terminal illnesses often find more beauty and sacredness in life than the rest of us? And when we see that, don't we wonder why we can't be like that every day? And suppose we laid aside all the petty, begrudging, trivial things we get so wrapped up in, and begin to see our family and friends in a new light? Come join us as we explore the meaning of living, dying, and rising.

Scripture Today:

Today's first reading from Exodus often leaves us with an uneasy feeling about God when we consider the words: “I am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation.”

I often tell people that we people of faith sometimes make God into our image and likeness, rather than letting God form us into his likeness. I do believe that it is true that God knows what will enable us to live most humanly and alive, and that when we place God at the center of our lives, the rest of our lives seems to fall into place. Maybe that is what Thomas Merton meant when he said: “When I have found my truest self, I have found God.”

Or perhaps the jealousy of God can be best understood in what St. Augustine meant when he said: “Our hearts are restless, God, until they rest in you.” Still we find the notion of God's punishment unsettling and upsetting, especially when in light of today's reading, it is “passed down to the third and fourth generations.” We can rationalize that those of us who are unfaithful to God may in fact be worthy of some form of suffering for our actions or lack thereof, but how is it fair to punish later generations of family members who may not have anything to do with former sins or failings?

Anyone who is familiar with psychology and maturation patterns will tell you that we often pass on our pathologies to those closest to us. I come from a family of alcoholics, and those of us in my “family tree” have this disposition to becoming alcoholics ourselves. It has nothing to do with God inflicting direct punishments on my family, but it's how genealogy seems to work. If one grows up in unhealthy family relationships, they are often predisposed to whatever family patterns were prevalent in the family. Is that how “wickedness” is passed on to former generations, and is it fair to blame God for those things?

Albert Einstein once said: “I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves.” Maybe it is us who are responsible for the sufferings and conditions of the world, by what we have done or modeled, or failed to do or model to the generations around us?

Alpha: Topic next week, “Why did Jesus Die?”

Talk summary:

- The cross is the symbol for Christianity. Why?
- ‘The Son of God’ – that is, Jesus – ‘loved me and gave himself for me’. If you had been the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for *you*. He loves *you* that much.
- Why did Jesus die?
- The problem: ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ We've all fallen short of God's standard
- Sin is powerful: (4 P's – pollution, power, penalty, partition) – it destroys our lives and separates us from God
- Jesus came to die for us – to take our sin upon himself – so that we can be free to have a relationship with God
- What are the results of the cross (pollution is cleansed, power is broken, penalty has been paid, partition is removed): Relationship with God and with others restored – forgiveness is possible.