The Easter Octave

Sunday, April 5 - Sunday, April 12, 2020
Eastertime lasts fifty days: seven weeks of seven days (seven equals Biblical perfection) plus one day: perfection plus! Like an eight-day Jewish wedding, or a child who can't bear to let go of Christmas, birthdays, and school vacation, the Church celebrates the Easter Octave: "the marriage of heaven and earth," as the Vigil calls Jesus' resurrection; our new members' baptismal rebirth; our renewal of baptismal vows; our hearts' "divine vacation" (Latin vacare, "to be empty"), newfound time and space for love of God and neighbor. Make home an Easter garden! Adorn the dining table with a pillar candle (your "paschal candle"), a bowl full of water (ideally, from the parish's baptismal font), a vase of flowers or bowl of sprouting grain with Easter eggs. Even non-singers can handle the three-fold Gospel Alleluia! Let that be your grace before meals, perhaps with a prayer recalling Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35): "Be known to us, Risen Lord Jesus, as you were to the first disciples, in your word, in the breaking of bread, and in everyone we meet."
—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Seeds Of Faith

There is a brevity, a certain terseness, in the scripture readings for Easter Sunday. Peter's speech in Acts is built of direct, pointed sentences. Paul's letters are based on straightforward creed-like statements. Even the Gospel story only briefly recounts what will turn out to be one of the most remarkable events in human history—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Advertising agents call these encapsulated points of information "bullet points." Scripture scholars call them kerygmata, or "kernels" of our faith. Actually, "kernels" or "seeds" are good terms for these statements, since throughout the Easter season, we will hear in the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of Paul, and the Gospel accounts of the days following the Resurrection exactly how these kerygmata began to flower, how they continued to grow through the life of the early church. May these Easter "seeds" of faith serve a similar purpose for us, too, so that the life of the Risen Christ will flourish in us and through our witness in the coming days.
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Readings for the Week

Monday: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Ps 16:1-2a, 5, 7-11; Mt 28:8-15

Tuesday: Acts 2:36-41; Ps 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; Jn 20:11-1

Wednesday: Acts 3:1-10; Ps 105:1-4, 6-9; Lk 24:13-35

Thursday: Acts 3:11-26; Ps 8:2ab, 5-9; Lk 24:35-48

Friday: Acts 4:1-12; Ps 118:1-2, 4, 22-27a; Jn 21:1-14

Saturday: Acts 4:13-21; Ps 118:1, 14-21; Mk 16:9-15

Sunday: Acts 2:42-47; Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday: Easter Sunday: Resurrection of the Lord; Julian Calendar Palm Sunday
Monday: Monday within the Octave of Easter
Tuesday: Tuesday within the Octave of Easter
Wednesday: Wednesday within the Octave of Easter; Income Tax Day
Thursday: Thursday within the Octave of Easter
Friday: Friday within the Octave of Easter; Julian Calendar Good Friday
Saturday: Saturday within the Octave of Easter

Today's Readings

First Reading — Peter is an eyewitness: The Lord is risen (Acts 10:34a, 37-43).
Psalm — This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad (Psalm 118).
(1) Second Reading — All who are baptized, set your hearts in heaven (Colossians 3:1-4) or
(2) Second Reading — Christ our Passover is sacri-ficed; therefore let us celebrate (1 Corinthians 5:6b-8).
Gospel — Three witnesses, Mary, Peter, and John; each responds to the empty tomb (John 20:1-9) or Matthew 28:1-10 (or, at an afternoon or evening Mass, Luke 24:13-35).
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Treasures From Our Tradition

The Lenten journey is now complete, its mission of renewal and preparation to receive new life fulfilled. The call to worship the Risen Lord has been received, and we gather to experience together the consoling presence of Christ in word and sacrament. We are at our best today, crowded and cramped to be sure, but the fullest sign of who were are meant to be. Christ has claimed us in the waters of baptism, we have acquired wonderful companions, and together we can accomplish great things.

This is the day for rekindling the old flames of baptismal commitment, so we light the paschal candle, and by its light we make yet again the ancient promises to reject evil's grip and empty promises. Today we do not recite the Creed, but respond with one voice to age-old questions. New life has to be nurtured, both the life of the newly baptized and the renewed life of those who have passed through Lent's refining prayer, fasting, and giving alms. At any Mass during the next fifty days, you may be surprised by grace and splashed by water!

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

If Christmas is the "most wonderful time of the year," then Easter is the most joyous, glorious, awesome time of the year! Really? Today's readings don't exactly brim over with the kind of holiday cheer we find at Christmas—except for the responsorial psalm, which admittedly rings with gleeful joy. But otherwise, not so much. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter gives a dry, condensed rendering of the story of Jesus to a group of Gentiles in Caesarea. The Colossians reading actually does have us looking forward to glory. Most underwhelming, though, is the Gospel proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we want to hear about angels and earthquakes and trumpets and glory, we hear about a dark, silent, empty tomb. This Easter Sunday story from John's Gospel is startling in its emptiness. Like Peter in the story, we must enter into this mystery.

The Mystery of Emptiness

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! This Paschal greeting is customary in Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches on Easter Sunday. Then there is Saint Augustine's acclamation of joy: We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song! However you express it, Easter is the time for rejoicing because Jesus Christ, our friend and brother, is risen from the dead. And yet today's scriptures are less joyful than one would expect for the most important feast in the Christian calendar. Perhaps we are being asked to look deeper into the mystery of the Resurrection, just as Peter went into the tomb to look deeper into the mystery of its emptiness.

Mary Magdalene, who loved the Lord so much that she risked everything, possibly even her life, to go to the tomb before daybreak, finds the stone rolled away and assumes that someone has taken Jesus' body. Frightened and sad, she runs to tell Peter and John. They all run back to the tomb, but what do they expect to see? Peter enters the tomb and sees. John enters, sees, and believes. But what does he believe? Scripture states, "For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead" (John 20:9). They went home, not really knowing what had happened. But John "believed" something.

Something Happened

What do we believe? Somewhere between that Easter morning and Peter's confident teaching about Jesus in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, something (the Risen Christ) happened. Peter has evolved from his bewilderment into a witness to the Resurrection.

What are we to find in the empty tomb? Maybe the Colossians reading has an answer. By entering the empty tomb of our lives to seek the Lord, we see, we believe, we die, to be raised with Christ. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). And we will rise in glory with him.

Today's Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37–43; Ps 118:1–2, 16–17, 22–23; Col 3:1–4 or 1 Cor 5:6b–8; Jn 20:1–9 or Mt 28:1–10

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Easter SUNDAY

APRIL 12, 2020

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

Psalm 118:24

WE NEED A RESURRECTION

I don't know about you, but every year around this time I feel like I could use a resurrection. Especially this year as I and many of us are "sheltering in place" in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our weather adds to the malaise: we're teased one day with light and warmth, then winter returns with cold, rain, or worse. Yes, it's getting lighter outside, but these end-of-winter doldrums seem to match what's going on inside us as well. We all need a change. We all need some good news. We need to be able to sing "Alleluia!"

And today, at least streaming online or on television, we have. The opening hymn, the sequence, the Gospel acclamation, alleluias everywhere! Blessed release! What are we to be so happy about? Saint Peter tells us today—he gives us the whole story, beginning with John the Baptist and going through Easter Sunday. And Peter doesn't stop there. There are appearances by Christ after his resurrection, and a commissioning, and the promise that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name. Alleluia!

But travel with me now back to that first Easter morning as John tells it today. It's dark, and Mary Magdalene is approaching the tomb. But look! Something's wrong! The stone's been rolled away! This is bad news, not good news. Agony, humiliation, and death aren't bad enough; now Jesus' body has been taken away. Mary runs to tell Peter and the other disciple. Breathless, she's not singing alleluia.

Peter and the beloved disciple run to the tomb and find it empty. See, the wrappings are in one place and the cloth for Jesus' head rolled up in another spot. After a week of bad news, all they get is an empty tomb. The story says that the disciple sees and believes, but it ends by reminding us that they didn't yet understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Not much to sing alleluia about, is it?

So why this story today, on the most joyous day of the year? Maybe it fits because we already know the rest of the story. In the very next verses, the Risen One appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden there, and later on to the other disciples. We have Peter's words from today's first reading, which, by the way, converted an audience of Gentiles on the spot. We know the meaning of the empty tomb, and it's not bad news. It's the best news there is. Out of death and defeat comes new life. God has promised it. God has done it. Alleluia!

It seems that these days we are waiting to see the rest of our own story. We've lost our way, we've lost a loved one, our jobs are in jeopardy, we don't know when this virus assault will end. We're at the empty tomb in the darkness, and we don't know what it means. We need resurrection. Well, the good news today is that resurrection will come. The story of passion and resurrection is our own story. Our empty tombs take on new meaning when we allow God to lift us up. The people who are awaiting baptism will know resurrection. Your uncle who overcame alcoholism knows resurrection. Sheltering in our homes, we will know resurrection. The triumph of Christ over darkness and death is complete, and we know it because of the faith of everyone who has ever gone this way before us.

Even as we wait at the empty tomb, we can sing alleluia. We can sing alleluia because we know the rest of the story, even before we get to the end.

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TODAY'S READINGS

Acts 10:34a, 37–43
Psalm 118:1–2, 16–17, 22–23
Colossians 3:1–4 or
1 Corinthians 5:6b–8
John 20:1–9 or Matthew 28:1–10 or
(at an afternoon or evening Mass)
Luke 24:13–35

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