

Easter Sunday 2014
April 20

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From Darkness to The Light!

The Easter story begins in early morning darkness. This is always how our discovery of the risen Christ begins: *in darkness....*

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb of Jesus who healed her, taught her, who treated her with respect and dignity and tenderness, and a love that she never thought she was worthy of. Witnessing that horrendous torture and death of perhaps the first man who treated her as a person, was overwhelming; with her heart broken, her hope defeated, and filled with grief and pain and... in darkness, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb.

My sisters and brothers, at one time or another, haven't we all been where Mary was? ...in darkness – defeat – despair – fear and brokenness? Maybe some of us are in that place right now, or we know somebody who is there:

- someone received terrible news from her physician;
- someone loses his job;
- someone hears the words: "I don't love you anymore;"
- a loved one suddenly dies;
- child get into serious trouble;
- a dear friend is enslaved in addiction;

and the list goes on...

It's often said that no one is ready to encounter Easter until he or she has spent time in the early morning darkness where hope cannot be seen. In such darkness, Easter is the last thing we are expecting -- and that's why Easter can terrify us. We dread the darkness; but sometimes we fear – even more – what lies beyond it. Sometimes the darkness we know is preferable to what we don't know..., we have at least learned to function and exist in the darkness. We sometimes even experience a distorted solace in the fact that darkness means that nothing more can disappoint or hurt us.

Easter's first light – illuminate those dark places we have become used to;

Easter's first light – focuses our vision and attention on what we have never seen before;

Easter's first light – dares us to imagine possibilities beyond our limited understanding of what is possible;

Easter's first light – calls us out of the darkness that shrouds our lives and into the light of possibility, of healing, of re-creation.

My sisters and brothers: Easter is not just the memorial of the historical event 2000 years ago calling us to believe that Christ once rose from the dead, proving he is God...; Easter is not just a doctrine we try to prove or a concept we argue about. Easter is a reminder that we don't have to stay in the darkness; we don't have to stay in the tomb!

Easter is the celebration that we are called to move from the darkness... move from the tomb... into the Light!

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Brothers and sisters, we are called this Easter morning – and throughout our journey of life – to experience the Resurrection in our own lives: the risen Jesus lives within us and among us

Encounter with the risen Christ liberates something within us and among us: a power - we didn't know we had; ...a hope, ...a capacity for life, ...a resilience and ability to bounce back when we thought we were completely defeated, ...a capacity to grow and change, ...a power of creative transformation!

For the Christian there is no defeat because Christ is risen and lives in us and among us and Christ has overcome all that seeks to destroy us!

My sisters and brothers, this is the faith upon which we Christians base our entire lives; this is the faith into which our Vi Ho and Erin Shambo are choosing to be Baptized on this Easter Vigil. This is the Church that our Ethan Joyce has chosen to be Confirmed into this Easter Vigil. This is the faith into which our Niomi Grace and Vera Rose Burns and Gerald Leandris Burns, Jr. are being Baptized this Easter Sunday Morning.

As Christians, *our entire lives* are changed, transformed, reborn, *over and over again* by the presence and the action of the Risen Christ within us and among us....!

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My brothers and sisters, rebirth – transformation – Resurrection are not only a call for our personal life but a call for the whole church as well. A little over a year ago our Catholic Church globally seemed in many ways to be shrouded in darkness and defeat: the ongoing and largely unattended global clergy sexual abuse scandal, money laundering in the Vatican bank, the leaking of confidential information from the Pope's own butler! Many folks leaving a church with which they just didn't seem connected anymore...; a Church that seemed to be drowning in ritualistic formality and empty forms of legalism – often seeming more like a theological relic than a really living faith. Some said the Holy Spirit seemed to be on an extended vacation... !

And then comes Pope Francis! ...who in just over a year has placed the Church into a new light – of which even the most optimistic would never have dreamed! Vatican expert John Allen points out that the most important accomplishment of Pope Francis so far has been a massive change in story: *from* a “church in crisis” *to* “humble peoples’ Pope takes world by storm.” While there is much unknown about what the church might ultimately look like, most experts agree that an amazing transformation, re-creation, rebirth is taking place in our Catholic Church... .

But what fewer people are aware of is that the possibility of institutional change in the Church is made real and valid and believable – because Pope Francis, in his own life, demonstrates the capacity for personal change. As a young Jesuit provincial in Argentina – at 36 years of age – Jorge Bergoglio is described by a close friend as an “unflinching traditionalist,” who was “very autocratic, ... a tough and sometimes heartless superior.” Following a humiliating demotion (he lost his job!) that led to an interior crisis, a dark night of the soul, the future pope emerged “transformed as an icon of radical humility. Francis speaks of mercy with the passion of someone who received it and was never the same again.” Transition - from darkness ...to light!

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But we know, sisters and brothers, that the light of change and transformation in the Church, most often comes not from center, but from the margins, ...from the prophets who can see clearly; ...from the voices of those who dare speak truth to power... risking being misunderstood and rejected.

An example is a letter that was printed in the New York Times last Sunday that our Parish LGBT Task Force asked that we put in our bulletin. It is a letter to Pope Francis on behalf of homeless LGBT Youth written by Carl Siciliano, the Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center – America’s largest center for homeless LGBT Youth – based in New York City. What the former Benedictine monk, who now works with homeless LGBT youth writes in this letter is startling and I encourage all of us to read it. In a nutshell, the letter points out that religious rejection is the most common reason gay youth are driven from their homes and the more involved parents are with the Church, the greater the chance that they will reject their children!

Heartbreaking examples are contained in the letter: Justin, whose mother – before throwing him out of his home – summoned a Catholic priest who held him to the ground and tried to drive the devil out of the 16-year-old boy! Another father was so disgusted that his boy was gay that he threw his son out of his home and said he would kill him and bury him in the backyard if you tried to return!

These are actions by religious people who are in darkness and don’t know it!

The letter points out that our present Catholic Church’s teaching that homosexual orientation is disordered influences countless parents and families in societies across the globe to reject their children... The letter begs our Church to face this issue and join a growing number of church communities and denominations who have chosen to welcome and embrace these children of God with love and acceptance. Last Fall, Pope Francis asked the opinion of all of us on issues surrounding family life and relationships. Let us pray that the Hierarchy listens to those voices and come together with a perspective on the family and related issues, that makes sense in the 21st century -- guided by love and light, not darkness.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis in his Exhortation: The Joy of The Gospel, ¶ 276:

Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always reemerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.

Amen! Alleluia!