

Easter 2016
March 27, 2016

Rev. Fred Daley
All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY

If you ever lived on a farm – or been at the State Fair at the right moment – you might have been fortunate enough to observe a little chick’s long journey to birth:

The not-yet-a-bird weighs little more than air; its beak and claws are barely pinpricks. The bird-to-be is in its own little world, protected by the rigid shell, warmed by a mother hen’s body, nourished by the nutrients within the eggs membrane.

But then, the chick begins the work of being born. Over several days the chick keeps picking and picking until it can break out of its narrow world and into an amazing wider one.

But, sisters and brothers, for this to happen – the egg has got to go to pieces. New life demands shattering the old. The real Easter egg (not a hard-boiled, dyed and painted egg, not a chocolate egg, impossible to shatter), the real Easter egg is shattered and destroyed. The real Easter egg exists in broken pieces. The real Easter egg is cracked open, yielding new life that has taken flight!

Sisters and brothers, on this Easter, our Easter Gospel, our Easter Faith, our Easter celebration centers on the “broken egg” of the empty tomb: “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen!”

+++++

Brothers and sisters, as disciples of the risen Jesus, gathered here at All Saints Church in the year 2016, we are called – we are challenged – not only to “believe” that Christ once rose from the dead 2000 years ago, thereby proving he was God (we kind of get that). Sisters and brothers, we here at All Saints – joining with sisters and brothers throughout the world – are once again called to experience the Resurrection in our own lives, by following the Christ who lives within us and among us; and – like the struggle of the little chick to free itself from its egg to embrace a much bigger world beyond it – over and over again through the “spring- cleaning of our hearts,” we struggle to break out of a world that we perceive is going to pieces; we pick away at an existence that leaves us unsatisfied, unfulfilled. The promise of the empty tomb is that we can break out of our self-contained little worlds and take flight into a world that is not limited by our egos, our fears, our hurts, our mistakes, our addictions... our jealousies, our resentments, our greed... whatever it might be that keeps us locked and chained in our little shells. Sisters and brothers, experiencing the Resurrection means shattering the old and being reborn — little by little, crack by crack, to become the persons and the people God created us to be ... precious, sacred, priceless works of art in process, ... progress not perfection...

+++++

Sisters and brothers, the risen life is not always easy because it's also a dying life. Just like the chick breaking through the shell is not easy. The presence of the Resurrection in our lives means the presence of the Cross, for we don't rise with Christ unless we also die with Christ. Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies it produces much fruit. It is by the Cross that we enter dynamism of creative transformation — dynamism of Resurrection and renewal — dynamism of love.

Sisters and brothers, no matter how dark and despairing and hopeless things in our life may seem: be not afraid... for true encounter with the Risen Christ liberates something within us and among us, a power we did not know we had; like chick breaking through the shell, we discover a hope, a capacity for life, a resilience, an ability to bounce back when we thought we were completely defeated... a capacity to grow and change; a power of creative transformation!

+++++

Brothers and sisters, for the Christian there is no defeat because Christ is risen and lives within us and among us ... and that is not the end of the story:

This experience of Resurrection and New Life and New Creation is not just about personal transformation in our lives, our relationship, our families and communities — as crucial as that is — but it's global as well!!

The journey of Holy Week, as the Gospels tell it, proclaims that what Jesus was passionate about led to his execution. His passion was the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God, a fire for the world to become the world God intended, the world that the Prophets dream of: a world of justice in which everybody has enough is systems are fair. This is God's dream — a dream that can only be realized by being grounded ever more deeply in the reality of God whose heart is justice. Jesus' passion for a just world got him killed — but God vindicated him. Good ultimately overcomes evil. As we look around this hurting, broken world in 2016 — with violence and brokenness streets of Syracuse to the streets of Brussels... It's easy to despair and give up and crawl back into our shells. But for the Christian there is hope; for the Christian there is no defeat, because Christ is risen ... and lives within and among us!

+++++

Sisters and brothers, when we have the courage to follow Christ, when we dare to be like Christ and even dare to follow our consciences, and – joining hands with sisters and brothers of goodwill to out our world, people of all faith traditions and people of no faith tradition – then, the shells, the walls that divide the world, the systems and structures of evil that bind us will come tumbling down and little by little the world will become the world God intended; *in fact*, that’s how the world has gotten this far...

Some powerful examples:

In our Catholic community, 50 years ago with Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, the doors and windows of the church were opened for new life and new creation as we were called to become a Church in the modern world. But for a number of decades since, those windows slowly and surely were closed and the lights dimmed, as a rigid hierarchy – like an egg tightly sealed, held onto centralized power, chained in self-preservation-at-all-costs by patriarchy, clericalism, and career climbing, hostility toward women, and the list goes on.

But then, suddenly – as if by magic – Pope Francis appears on the scene of history! He comes from “...the ends of the earth,” the Third World: Argentina – outside the center of power of the Roman and European Church. Francis – not liberal, not conservative, just Gospel! And, yes, sisters and brothers, we have a long way to go, but the egg is falling to pieces and new life is blossoming. Rejecting a notion of church is a fortress surrounded by enemies at all times, Pope Francis sees church as a home, with open windows and doors, so that those on the inside can go out and meet others, especially the poor and forsaken – a house where those on the outside can come in, without “paying at the toll booth,” as Pope Francis jokingly puts it. It is a church of all and for all – a poor church for the poor, and if that’s not an experience of global Resurrection, I don’t know what is...! And there’s no putting the egg back together, no matter how loud the Curial resistance rises; as I like to say: you can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube!

Another example is the call to save our Mother Earth, our common home. Fifty years ago there were a few voices crying in the wilderness and today the global village is waking up (everyone that is, other than a few candidates running for president...) and there is hope that, joining together, we can make a difference before it’s too late; an experience of Global Resurrection — Global Transformation!

On this Easter 2016 the growing cancer of terrorism is frightening: the cold-blooded violence and evil is almost too hard to comprehend; but the prophets in our midst – who are difficult to hear in the midst of the calls for more violent counterterrorism – remind us that if there is ever going to be the global peace, then there must be global justice.

In a world where so few have so much and so many have so little... (America's 20 wealthiest individuals – a group that could fit comfortably in one single luxury jet – now own more wealth than the bottom half of the American population combined... a total of 152 million people in 57 million households. America's 20 wealthiest people have more wealth than the bottom half: 152 million people combined!!) We will never be a world at peace without getting at the root causes of poverty and hunger and repression; there will never be peace unless the world comes to recognize our interdependence ... a huge challenge of the 21st century...

In the midst of this crisis, there is hope in the steadfastness and inner strength of millions of refugees fleeing for their lives and overcoming amazing obstacles to find a new life. A powerful example are our parish families from the Congo! You give us hope this Easter! and we welcome our newest family into our community! Resurrection! New Life! Alleluia! Or as they might say in the Congo: "Uga'nga"!

And so, sisters and brothers, on this Easter once again we stand at the entrance to the broken tomb. The Christ who challenges us to love one another is risen and walks among us. All that he taught is vindicated and affirmed by God's raising him up. The empty tomb consoles us, elates us and challenges us to embrace the Life of the Gospel — with Easter faith, we can awaken the promise of the empty tomb in every place and moment we encounter in our journey of life. Amen!