

Easter 2012
April 7th & 8th
All Saints Parish
Rev. Fred Daley

“The Egg Must go to Pieces”

For centuries, the egg has been a symbol of Easter:

A small chick begins a long journey to birth. A not-yet-bird weighs little more than air; its beak and claws are barely pin-pricks. The bird-to-be is in its own little world, protected by the rigid shell, warmed by the mother hen’s body, nourished by the nutrients within the egg membrane.

But eventually, the chick begins the work of life: over several days, the chick keeps pecking and picking until it can break out of its narrow world - and into a terribly wider one.

But for this to happen: the egg has to go to pieces - new life demands shattering the old... yielding *new life* ready to take flight...

My brothers and sisters, I think that this little parable says something about where we are at in our world and our Church today. There’s something in the air... Our institutions and structures, secular and religious, just don’t seem to be working so well anymore. The common good is being neglected in the midst of dysfunction and polarization and self-interest; the few benefitting on the backs of the many. More and more, our systems and institutions - nationally and globally - seem dysfunctional in the face of the life and death issues facing us today: poverty, societal violence, the horrors of war, the destruction of the environment, greed - the addiction to consumerism, sexism, racism, homophobia, and the list goes on. For those living within these shells, they are becoming houses of fear.

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My sisters and brothers, as Christians, as Catholics, as Baptized Disciples, as members and friends of our All Saints Community, what does all this say to us on this Easter 2012? As I mentioned on Good Friday, it seems that each day more and more Christians and people of good will are searching and seeking - for clues - to the meaning of life.

Who is God anyway? Who is this Jesus of the Gospels? What does it really mean to follow Jesus today in a world of mega-death and rampant injustice? What does it mean to really be a Christian in this new age...? And, where is our Catholic Church in all of this?

As those of us with grey hair can remember, in 1959, Pope John XXIII - reading the 'signs of the times' with an amazing keenness - realized that our Catholic Church was outgrowing its egg and that through the centuries, while holding on to the essentials, structures and forms and ways of governing and ministering were always evolving, so he opened the windows of the Church, to let the wind of the Spirit blow through the structures that had become stale and tired. John XXIII, in calling the 2nd Vatican Council, called for the chicken in its shell - the Church - to break out of its narrow world into a terribly wider one!

And so: The Second Vatican Council, in its magnificent documents, formed the vision for a new Church to be born:

- a Church in touch with the world, and its problems;
- a Church deeply faithful to the Gospels;
- a Church that would be a servant, ... a herald, ... prophetic;
- a Church that would be more compassionate, more understanding, more loving...
... more like Jesus;
- a Church not assimilated by the world... but salt and yeast and light *for* the world!

And the pecking at the shell that had grown ever thicker and thicker through the ages began in earnest.

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This year - 2012 - we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, and what amazing new life has flourished in our time:

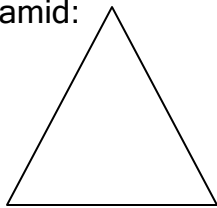
- liturgy that we can understand and be part of;
- a Church more dedicated to the poor than ever;
- a Church where ministry is flourishing because Catholics are realizing that through Baptism, instead of just paying and praying, they - we all - are called to use our marvelous gifts for the building of the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven;”
- a Church where we can dialogue with Protestants, Jews, Muslims; where people with differing faiths, and no faith, can work together to make our world a better place.

And yet, as we sit here this Easter, 50 years later, we are a Church in crisis.

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My sisters and brother, change doesn't come easily; leaving that warm safe egg and facing the unknown, frightening world... I'm sure many chickens would rather crawl back into their shell.

So in the last 25 years, there has been a push among some within our Church, to hang onto the egg shell - the outdated: medieval. patriarchal, feudalistic - shell. A structure shaped like a pyramid:



- Pope - King
- Bishops - Princes
- Priests - Vassals
- Laity - serfs: who obediently pay and pray, with no power and no voice.

Rather than break the egg shell open into the new vision of Vatican II, there are those who would rather color the egg... “freshen up” the old structure...

So while our world is in many ways struggling with issues of life and death, in its own dysfunctional and outdated systems and policies:

- our hierarchy is more concerned with changing the wording of the Liturgy to be more like the literal Latin, than to reflect the sensibility of contemporary people;
- some in our hierarchy are more concerned with artificial contraception, than with universal health care. (If one is *truly* concerned about abortion, one should recognize that the more accessible artificial contraception is - the *fewer* abortions there will be; the greater the economic security - the *fewer* abortions, the higher the level of education - the *fewer* abortions.)
- a hierarchy, that - after ten years of being exposed and humiliated in the revelations of the clergy sexual abuse scandal and its cover-up - still is listening by and large to its lawyers rather than to the Gospel; with those on the top refusing to take responsibility for their actions.
- a hierarchy that would rather close parishes - making the Eucharist unavailable to many Catholics around the world (building instead imperial sized, mega-churches), rather than even allow a *discussion* about optional celibacy and the ordination of women, that would not only solve the problem of a clergy shortage, but address a crying issue of justice.
- a hierarchy, some of who would rather have a smaller Church of loyal, 'radically obedient' children, than a Church that listen to and dialogues with its people.

As we've reflected on before, in the midst of this restoration, the major symptom manifesting this crisis is that more and more sisters and brothers are searching elsewhere because they feel the Church is not meeting their spiritual needs. How many of your children and grandchildren are active Catholics? Over the last 20 years, one-third of Catholics have left the Church - making "former Catholics" the *second largest* religious denomination in the United States! And, about 70% of those who remain Catholic do not attend Church.

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My sisters and brothers, we are living in a time of transition: where the shell containing our religious belief system is changing from a medieval paradigm to a powerful new one - envisioned by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.

And so, brothers and sisters, what do we do in this time of transition? The answer lies in our celebration here, and we are called - not only to believe that Christ once rose from the dead, proving that he was God - we are called to experience the Resurrection in our own lives and communities.

When all is said and done,

- ❖ Christ lives in us - if we love one another;
- ❖ Christ lives in us and leads us in a new future which we build together: the new future called the Realm of God!

True encounter with Christ within us and among us awakens something in the depths of our being - something we didn't know was there. True encounter with Christ liberates something in us:



- a power,
- a hope,
- a capacity for life,
- a capacity to grow and change!

For the Christian, there is NO DEFEAT because Christ is risen and lives in us!

As Christians, as Catholics, as members and friends of All Saints - we must have the courage to follow Christ. The Christian who is risen in Christ must dare to be like Christ! The Christian must dare to follow conscience even in unpopular causes. The Christian must be able to disagree with the majority and make decisions that one knows to be according to the Gospel teaching of Christ --- even when others don't understand. The Christian must never let our religious ideas, customs, rituals and conventions become more real to us than the Risen Christ. For Christians, like St. Paul says: all manner of religious observance and legalisms are worthless if they get in the way of our faith in Jesus Christ or prevent us from loving our brothers and sisters without exception.

So my prayer this Easter for all of us is to hang in there!

- that we all realize that we are the Church.... The hierarchy (Pope, bishops, priests and deacons) are at their best when they serve the Church and at its worst when the Church becomes its own “god” - demanding to be served.
- that even in the midst of pain and suffering, we patiently - like John XXIII - plant seeds for something new.

My great hope is that this new Church *is being realized and is flourishing* on the grassroots level throughout the world... and real change always come from the bottom. We are transitioning from a  to a  !

This hope is manifested so profoundly in our five young people who are joining in full communion with our Church this Easter: Sean Patrick Delaney, Alexander Garrad, Eric McDay, Elizabeth O’Hare and Dennis Faber, and the infants Vincent Jonathan Marrone and Brianna Rogers who are being Baptized.

As the mystic Julian of Norwich assures us: “All will be well!”

Amen!