

EASTER BRINGS JOY, HOPE, AND NEW LIFE



Christopher News Notes

CHRIST IS RISEN!

The good news of Easter peals out in bells and alleluias. In celebrating the resurrection of Jesus—not just as a past event, but as an ongoing reality—we stand with Mary Magdalene outside His tomb, our lives transformed. Sometimes, though, circumstances keep us from believing that this good news is meant for us because we can be too lost in our earthly sorrows to see clearly. Can we really trust that death is ended? Can we find joy and new life here on earth? Easter answers a resounding “Yes!”

MAKING PEACE WITH THE PAST

During Lent, many Christians make sacrifices for God, either giving up something they love or taking on a task to grow in holiness. Sometimes, these practices can lead to us becoming newer, better versions of ourselves.

Katie Minter Jones of Musella, Georgia, promised to make 48 Easter baskets for the kids at a local children's home, but she refused to deliver them herself. Katie had grown up in a similar home, and her memories of it were extremely negative. She didn't think she could emotionally handle going inside a similar facility.

As Katie wrote in *Guideposts*, friends, church members and neighbors all contributed to her effort, donating toys, candy, and small copies of the New Testament. A friend dropped the baskets off at the children's home, and Katie thought that was the end of the story. Then, her husband Clay pointed out they still had a lot of leftover candy that should go to the children as well. Despite her reluctance, Katie took it to the children's home personally to drop it off.

Almost as soon as a worker opened the door, a little girl stood beside her and asked Katie if she would like to see what the Easter Bunny brought her. Katie couldn't turn the child down, so she followed the girl, who happily showed off her basket.

Katie has kept up the Easter basket tradition for 22 years and counting. She writes, "We provide them for children's homes, shelters and foster homes in nine counties. Each basket contains a small New Testament, a stuffed animal, a chocolate bunny, candy and other treats. People say you can't change the past. But you can change the way you feel about it and find peace. I had no idea 48 Easter baskets could do that. Someone did, though."

That someone, of course, was Jesus, who led a woman still troubled by her long-ago past to move beyond the darkness and bring God's love and light to children in need.

THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

"The Cross had asked the questions; the Resurrection had answered them."

—Ven. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

As a Coptic Christian priest in Egypt, where Christians undergo daily persecution, Benjamin Mofta lives with the knowledge that death might be near. One day, it reached out to claim his friend and fellow Coptic priest Samaan Shehata. The two were traveling to Cairo on a pastoral visit to families when an ISIS terrorist jumped in front of their vehicle. He attacked the two priests, killing Samaan and injuring Benjamin. This encounter with hatred and death did not lessen Father Benjamin's faith, however. It strengthened him.

"I feel like I can move even more freely," he says. "I just do what God asks of me. Fear would make me passive...I live my life with Christ. In Jesus, there is no fear of death. Father Samaan is in a good place now with Christ, whom he loves so much."

The faith embodied by Christians facing martyrdom without fear is awe-inspiring. But how do we everyday believers find hope at Easter when we or our loved ones suffer? Teacher Sarah Stuntz wrote about her own journey on the website of Christ the King Boston church. When Sarah's father received a terminal diagnosis, her Sunday-school faith was deeply shaken. Prayers for physical healing were of no avail. Sarah entered a wasteland of despair after her father died, but with strong support from her church community, she endured this time of doubt.

Sarah says, "Every year since 2011, I experience Easter a little differently. I think this is because, now, I have finally been forced to sit in the darkness of Good Friday. I see now that this world, which is full of promise, is also full of death and suffering. And I am not promised that the death and suffering will be made right immediately—or even in this lifetime.

"But because of Christ's resurrection," Sarah continues, "I can also hope that my own death is not

THREE WAYS TO FIND (AND BRING) EASTER HOPE ALL YEAR LONG

- 1. See the world with "Easter eyes."**
Be on the lookout for signs of hope—in nature, in other people, in God—wherever you are. And tell others what you see.
- 2. Be present at the foot of the cross.**
Don't hesitate to ask for help in your own times of trouble. And be there with others when they suffer sorrow or doubt.
- 3. Choose life over death, always.**
In everything you do, be a witness to hope. Live as though you know death doesn't get the last word...because it doesn't.

the end of the story. I can even bear to sit in and grieve the million 'little deaths' before my death—missing my father, mourning broken dreams, struggling with a frail earthly body—because I am promised that these are not the *whole* story."

RESURRECTION IN THE NATURAL WORLD

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus' tomb was located in a garden. The story of Mary Magdalene's meeting with the Risen Christ there (John 20:11-18) is no coincidence. Death entered the world in the garden that was Eden, and all creation suffered. By His saving death, Jesus makes all creation new.

The signs of new life in nature are a reminder that death has no dominion. This is so even in the southern hemisphere, where Easter comes not in spring but in the fall. Blogger Norann Voll writes from Down Under: "I've learned that the seasonal changes here in regional New South Wales are a little more subtle—but the harbingers of the Easter season are here nonetheless. It's our early autumn. Here are a few treasures: a sunflower at dawn, the chicory gracing my walk to work...earth shadow over the pounding surf and memorable sunsets. No matter where you live, all of creation is proclaiming: He is not here, He is risen!"

EASTER BRINGS NEW LIFE

"Do not abandon yourself to despair. We are Easter people and Hallelujah is our song."

—Pope St. John Paul II

Easter has always been prime time for welcoming new members into the Church, allowing us to be "Easter people," who embody faith, hope, and love. As St. Paul wrote in Romans 6:4, "We have been buried with Him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

After her son Anthony committed suicide, writer Leticia Ochoa Adams struggled to "find something good" to write about. One thing that came to mind was the decision by Anthony's fiancée, Ariana, to enter the Church at Easter. Leticia, a convert herself, wrote at *Aleteia*, "Being received into the Church at the Easter Vigil of 2010 was one of the best nights of my life, and as I recalled all the love and support that I was surrounded with on that night, I realized I wanted Ariana to have that same kind of experience."

Her idea, however, grew beyond just Ariana to touch all those entering the Church at Easter. Similar to Katie Minter Jones in the earlier story, Leticia's initiative was to create "Welcome Home" baskets, filled with donated Bibles, prayer books, rosaries, medals, even notes from schoolchildren. The whole parish got involved in welcoming people beginning a new life in Christ—and helping a

grieving mother bring joy and faith to others.

One place that hope is in short supply is in prison. That's why prison minister Father Paul Kottackal was so moved to find it in one of the men he visited. The inmate had been scheduled to be released at Easter after 16 years, so Father Paul was surprised to see him still there a week later. It turned out the parole board had postponed his release for five years, without giving him a reason.

"As soon as I heard it I thought of killing all the members of the board," the inmate told Father Paul. "I could not control my feelings. I was afraid that I would end up doing something terrible. Then I remembered the homily that you gave on Easter Sunday. You said the message of Easter is that of hope. The apparent defeat of Jesus, and His death, remained only for three days. Afterwards He emerged victorious."

The inmate, who had entered the Church while in prison, said he forced himself to remember that he was committed to Jesus. He had to place his hope in the Lord. "The extension of my stay in the prison, though painful, may be for good," he told Father Paul. "I am not unhappy now. I called my family and consoled them."

Father Paul was stunned. "When I heard this story," he wrote in the *Texas Catholic*, "I felt challenged. How would I respond to situations like this? I prayed, Oh God please give me the grace to say always, 'Thy will be done,' as this prisoner did."

The world brings this same challenge to each of us. But in a hundred different ways, if we open our eyes and are willing to accept it, Easter brings the joy, hope, and new life we need to make Hallelujah our song.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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"The joyful news that He is risen does not change the contemporary world. Still before us lie work, discipline, sacrifice. But the fact of Easter gives us the spiritual power to do the work, accept the discipline, and make the sacrifice."

—Henry Knox Sherrill