Easter Sunday, 2022

St. Mary’s, Riverside

The purple is happily packed away

Ashes are now in some back sacristy cupboard

Cheerless hymns about repentance and sin

are shelved until next February

and our old friend “Alleluia” is enthusiastically welcomed

back into our liturgical repertoire.

We have survived the trek through the dessert

Endured the fasting, abstinence and a myriad

of self-imposed penances

And come out if not physically or spiritually leaner

At least content that we gave it our best

And now we can relax until Lent rolls around again.

Let the lilies bloom

The candles blaze

The trumpets sound

And joy be our only companion.

He is risen, enough said

So maybe it is time for the preacher to sit down now

… But maybe not.

While our sanctuary gleams with lights

War rages in the Ukraine.

While children feast on jellybeans and chocolate rabbits

humanitarian crises rages through Yemen and Afghanistan

And while festive tunes brighten our worship

Lament cries out across a bruised and battered world.

Like me, maybe you were hoping that this Easter liturgy

Would be a momentary respite

From the bad news that haunts our newspapers

And fills the airwaves

But the liturgy of the church is not an escape

From the liturgy of the world

Where Lent is far from over

And Good Friday is daily reenacted in too many lives.

Moreover, the ongoing Passiontide

That erupts around the globe and in our neighborhoods

With bullying and brutality, bullets and bombs

May provide surprising and necessary wisdom

As we immerse ourselves in the mystery we call Easter.

The language of mystery – *musterion* –

occurs often in the New Testament.

St. Paul, who uses the language of mystery much more

Than any other New Testament writer

is our best guide here

For Paul Christ is the very mystery of God [Col 2:2]

Prepared before the beginning of the world [1 Cor 2:8]

Hidden in God [Eph 3:9]

Concealed from previous generations

and now revealed to the saints [Eph 3:5]

Surprisingly the mystery of God in Christ

is not only about the past, about a remote revelation

But rather, the unfolding of the mystery continues.

As a favorite definition of mystery notes:

A mystery is a divine secret in the process of being revealed.

That means that the mystery of God in Christ

Particularly as revealed in his rising

Persists as a continuing epiphany.

Yes, the resurrection, which can mistakenly be considered

A remote event, confined by human history

Achieved by Christ millennia ago in that Jerusalem graveyard,

Not only endures, but in the words of Pope Benedict XVI

Opens up a new kind of future for us all.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Easter is the mystical name

We give to this to this unfolding mystery

Celebrated today in all of its promise and ambiguity:

A feast not only focused on post-death promises

That we will live forever

But – as with all things Christian –

A feast with a pressing pre-death agenda

With wisdom about living in the present moment

In the midst of every family joy and distress

In the baffling beauty and chaos of the present world.

In fact, one could argue that Easter is less a feast

Than a spirituality intended to mark

every day of our trek through life

For as St. Augustine reportedly remarked:

We are an Easter people …

One often overlooked facet of this ongoing mystery

As we close the door on Lent

And strike up the Alleluias

Is that like any spirituality

An Easter spirituality takes effort

Which means that the very promise of resurrection

Also requires work.

Now you might be thinking to yourself

No … resurrection is a gift

It is something that Jesus did without us,

A promise given to us in baptism.

We just have to hold on tight,

And it will ultimately come to us

as we make that awesome journey

From this life to the next.

But I would contend that the liturgies of this past week

And the events in Jesus’ life they conjure

Tell a much different tale.

Jesus not only labored and struggled against death

In the dramatic final days that ended in crucifixion

He labored for life throughout his earthly existence

Cultivating the gift of resurrection everywhere he went

Raising up marginalized women and children

planting hope in the desperately sick and broken

and investing faith in often lackluster disciples.

Death and resurrection were not isolated events in the Jesus tale

Like some unexpected twist at the end of a mystery novel

But culminating events profoundly interwoven

with the life and ministry

that persistently and ultimately

prepared for them.

The whole of Jesus’ life, especially his public ministry,

Was an unfolding Easter tale

Bringing light where there was darkness

Healing where there was pain

Acceptance where there was abandonment

And this work of Easter

The task of being heralds of resurrection

Purveyors of life

Agents of renewal

Has been bequeathed to all of us who invoke his name.

I don’t know if you have seen the stories

But over the past year or so

There have been a number of reports of folk

Once paralyzed by completely severed spinal cords

Who can now walk thanks to implants

that stimulate neurons in the spinal cord[[2]](#endnote-2)

These implants mimic the signals

The lower body usually receives from the brain

Enabling them to recover basic lower body functions

Lost to them after their injuries.

These almost miraculous stories of resurrection, however,

Do not come without work …

Without the labor of researchers and surgeons

Neuroscientists and physiologists

To fine develop and fine tune these procedures

But also work of the patients

Who undergo extensive therapies

Necessary for reacquiring basic body functions

Any of you who have ever broken a bone

Or undergone major surgery

Requiring follow up physical therapy

Understand that dynamic.

Many years ago, my maternal grandmother had a stroke,

She was a very determined woman.

When I went to visit her in the hospital

She said, in her typically direct manner,

“get me out of here.”

I told her that the doctor’s would not let her out

Until she could walk out on her own.

She then looked at me with steely resolve and said

“Well, if you can’t get me out of here

Then get me up!”

She took her first lap around the hospital floor that day

And was discharged a week later.

Resurrection takes work.

We live in a world longing for resurrection

Whether that is in the Ukrainian port city of Mariopol

Or on the main streets of our own troubled cities

In the lives of refugees and evacuees

And in the hearts of those grieving the loss of a loved one

In the shattered dreams of a neglected child

And in the dying embers of a broken relationship.

Sometimes those most in need of resurrection in their lives

Have neither the strength nor the motivation

To labor on their own

And so we companion, encourage, support them

on the journey to whatever Easters are in their future.

It is a supposedly true story, those are always the best:

At the 1976 Seattle Special Olympics, 1976 nine contestants, all with physical or mental disabilities, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash.   At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win.

All, that is, except one boy who stumbled, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.  Two of the other racers heard the boy cry.  They slowed down and paused.  Then they turned around and went back.  Some reports say one girl with Down’s syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, “This will make it better.”  Then this unlikely apostolic trio linked arms and walked to the finish line together.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Resurrection is the finish line we all hope to cross

Easter is the sometimes slow,

often difficult path for getting there

On the way there are small stumbles and national crises

Minor wounds and rifts in the very fabric of our humanity.

The Easter promise and challenge is that

We do not, should not, cannot run that race alone.

And so in blessing we pray

That this day of light and promise

Might shatter the darkness of war

And the discouragement of rejection

that this feast of hope and future

Fill hearts oppressed by fear

Or crippled with despair

And that this shared Easter journey

Bring comfort to our souls

Reconciliation to our families

Healing to our communities

And a restorative balm to a world

Yearning for resurrection

1. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 211)*,* p. 244 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00367-1> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveconnects/session4/161765.shtml> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)