

Homily for Easter 2009

WHAT IF CHRIST HAD NOT BEEN RAISED... Saint Paul asks himself this question. He says: If Christ has not been raised, our faith is in vain, because the centre of our faith is trust that the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his life are the fulfilment of God's promise. If Jesus is just another dead man in history, he is neither God nor the Living One, and therefore our faith has no substance.

That is the way Monica thought. She's been married to Bill for 18 years. It's not a perfect Marriage but as good as she could expect. Their common connection was their three Children. Monica felt herself pretty fortunate but there was something that bothered her.

She remembered her childhood, and the importance of religion, but she and Bill decided that religion was passé. Religion had too much baggage and it complicated life. Yet *now* she was frustrated and life was *already* complicated.

She wondered if she was doing all she could for her children. She saw tendencies develop in her teenagers that she didn't like. They could be so selfish. They didn't appreciate the things she and Bill did for them.

Monica realized with horror that she had created her children in her image and likeness, self-serving, narrow-minded, and full of the same fears and worries that plagued her. She lived with this uneasy dissatisfaction till one of her girlfriends asked her to be a sponsor for Confirmation.

It flattered her even though her girlfriend said it was only because Monica was the only Catholic she knew.

Monica agreed to be the sponsor; she thought it would be a good reminder of why she is not religious.

At class with her friend she was surprised to hear Jesus words **“I will break the chains that bind you”** She thought religion bound a person. *But even without religion she felt like she had bound herself in chains.* She heard the words, **“Awake O sleeper rise from death, and I will give you life”** She thought she had life. *But if what she had was life, it wasn't all that great.* She went to Mass for the first time in many years and it jolted her like water in the face when she realized that just possibly Jesus was real, alive, and that he valued her enough to want to be by her side.

She chose to believe that Jesus words to her were true. Then one day at Mass she broke down and cried, overwhelmed at the thought that she was precious in the eyes of God. When she finally received Communion, it was almost too much for her to comprehend; that Christ would choose to let himself be possessed by her. She remembered nursing her children, and the deep bond of love it created between them. How could she have deprived her children of this gift from God? She had kept her children from knowing a gift she once possessed, threw away, and now needed so badly.

She began to help out at the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and was amazed at the satisfaction that caring for and helping other people gave her. She began to pray and was overwhelmed by the clarity of the guidance she was giving her children. She realized that she loved her husband, and began to talk about real things with him. *She*

knew that she had been dead, but Christ had brought her back to life.

Zeke is a college student in his early twenties. When he thinks about his future he is sure of only one thing; he wants a job where he can get rich quick.

Zeke smoked a little pot and sometimes drank too much. He said he was medicating himself so he didn't have to think about things. One time when he was bored and there was no pot or alcohol available, he picked up a pamphlet on the Stations of the Cross his dad had left around the house. Something struck him. He said it was like waking up to an alarm clock. Either Jesus is really God and God really cared about him, or Jesus was the biggest scam artist that ever lived.

St. Paul said, **“If Christ has not been raised, we are, of all people, the most pitiable, because we were given hope, which was then converted into tragic frustration.”** Zeke had always assumed that religion was a myth. But his life *now* seemed like tragic frustration.

As he thought about Jesus, and his suffering, he was troubled. He decided that he needed to choose once and for all if he was a believer or not. He began to read the bible a little, and asked a friend about Jesus. It disturbed Zeke that he found the information compelling. He heard wisdom about the purpose of human living that he never expected to find. What he heard made better sense than any of the shallow ramblings of his friends or his college professors. It brought him a sense of peace he had never before felt.

Zeke hadn't been to church for a long time. When curiosity brought him to Mass he heard the words **“This is**

my body given for you, this is my blood poured out for you.” It seemed he had never heard those words before. He realized he had ignored a privilege that had been granted to him years ago, the privilege to be called into the presence of God, the privilege to have Christ stand beside him before God and call him *brother*. A searing awareness came over Zeke that Jesus words of love and forgiveness were spoken to *him* personally.

It was like a whole new universe opened to him. Zeke discovered a dignity that he never knew he could have. His life had purpose now, and though it hasn’t cured all his struggles with loneliness and friendships, he is convinced of his value as a person and the loneliness doesn’t feel so painful; he doesn’t feel that heavy emptiness in his life.

Zeke now reads about his faith, prays and feels at home in the Mass. He commented to me once, “How could I have ever missed this?” “How could I have been so blind? It’s as if I had been sleepwalking through life for 25 years and now, suddenly, I am awake and living”. He knows the meaning of the words; *“You who once were dead have now been given flesh and life.”*

These are true stories about people who are sitting here next to you in this Church. They have happened within the last 10 months. These are two of the many testimonies of *new life* that could never have occurred had Christ not risen from the dead. As the Easter proclamation says, **“What good would life have been to us had Christ not come as our redeemer?”** These things have taken place here among us.

About 1200 people in the Seattle Archdiocese have joined the Church this weekend. Their stories are too numerous to tell. But what is common to all is the realization that Jesus is a breaker of chains and that His resurrection gives life deeper meaning and clearer purpose.

Jesus bestowed dignity and value on these people that they never knew was possible. This Easter not only commemorates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but also, many lives that were empty and meaningless have experienced new life through him. They, too, celebrate their waking up to new hope and seeing the world from an entirely new perspective. We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus because even today he has power to bring life to those who live in a state of hazy half sleep.

If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, there would be no hope; there would be no meaning for human existence. That might be fine for those who are afraid of life and who are afraid of their call to be little less than the angels, but we were made to find our peace and fulfilment in God, and if we ignore God we will forever be bound in the chains and darkness of a frustrating existence.

If Christ has not been raised, we are false witnesses. If Christ has not been raised, you have not been released from your sins; your baptism was an empty, sterile ritual. You have not died with Christ, or been raised with him. If Christ has not been raised, sin and the devil still have the last say.

But just look around you, the overwhelming testimony points to the truth that; ***“In fact, however, Christ has been raised from the dead, as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep.”***