

Easter Season Evangelization

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by

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Karen posted this on Facebook:

Do your kids ever say something that completely catches you off guard and makes you wonder what God has planned for them? Today, at lunch Liam (a five-year old) started talking about my wedding ring.

Me: "Daddy got it for me when we got married"

Liam: "I need a ring because I'm married too."

Me: "Really!!! That is interesting when did you get married?"

Liam: "I married God. When I was a baby. (All matter-of-factly)"

Me (with chills): "Wow buddy. That's amazing!"

I'll be the first to admit that I haven't been the best Catholic and have fallen away from the church, but we say our prayers and are working harder to get to church each week. I have NEVER said this to him before and hearing it out of his mouth gives me comfort, makes me curious of the great things that are to come for our little guys, and is a reminder to never lose faith.

#life with the boys / #God gave me you

I thoroughly enjoyed Karen's story because it is about an occurrence of unexpected evangelization in a family. The child, before reaching the age of reason, is evangelizing his mother. With schools closed and children at home with their parents during the COVID-19 global pandemic, I am sure that there are many instances of evangelization taking place in our Catholic families during this Easter Season. Perhaps Almighty God is using this Easter Season to evangelize the Catholic Families of the United States as they spend more time within the confines of their household. God will evangelize us in the silence and solitude of isolation. God will evangelize us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Music that we read and listen to so as to keep from being idle. And yes, God also evangelizes us as we contemplate the Mysteries of our Salvation; and during the Easter Season there are three mysteries and each mystery has a fruit

which we know as a Theological Virtue. Easter is the celebration of the Resurrection (the First Mystery), and its fruit is Faith. Forty Days later we observe the Ascension of Jesus into heaven (the Second Mystery), and its fruit is Hope. Finally, we close the Easter Season with the Third Mystery, Pentecost, and the fruit is God's unconditional love.

In the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead we are evangelized by God's glory, the sanctifying power of the resurrection, and our restoration to eternal life. On Good Friday we celebrate the passion and the suffering of Jesus, for it is by dying he has destroyed our death. But on Holy Saturday night we transition to celebrating God's glory because by rising He restores our life. At the Easter Vigil the Exultet is sung and we are exhorted to be glad because the earth is covered in glory, and we are to rejoice because Mother Church is now arrayed in the light of God's glory. The glory of the Risen Lord evangelizes us! As the Exultet is sung we hear that the saving work of Jesus results in wickedness being dispelled, faults being washed away, innocence being restored, hatred being driven out and replaced by harmony among people. The sanctifying power of the Risen Christ evangelizes us! During the Easter Sunday Mass, we renew the promises we made at our baptism and profess our faith. Immediately afterwards we are sprinkled with holy water. This is to remind us that in baptism (the sacrament of Faith), we experience a purification, a regeneration, and a renewal. We die in the waters of baptism to sin and then rise with Christ a "new creature," a "child of God," and "a partaker of the Divine nature." God evangelizes us as He restores us to eternal life in the resurrection of his Only Begotten. God evangelizes us and our response is Faith.

In the gospels there is a constant juxtaposition between faith and fear. On Friday, March 27th, 2020, Pope Francis appeared in an empty St. Peter's Plaza to deliver his Urbi et Orbi message in the midst of the global pandemic. He first read from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 4:35) the account of Jesus being asleep in the boat with the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee during a storm. The disciples had that sinking feeling, and they feared perishing in the storm. The Holy Father spoke to the city of Rome and the World about Faith and its polar opposite, Fear. He said, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies." Our God is a God who saves. From the crucifixion God brought forth the resurrection. We respond to God's evangelization by placing our faith in God especially during the anxious, uncertain, and turbulent times. Like Jesus, we press onward trusting in God's power to bring good out of every situation and knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Meditation on the Mystery of the Resurrection strengthens our Faith!

The opening prayer for the Mass of the Ascension of the Lord emphasizes the fruit of this mystery. You will hear the celebrant pray, "Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and,

where the Head has one before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope. Through our Lord Jesus....” Being led into the light of God’s glory in heaven is the ultimate Christian hope. As we celebrate this hope, God evangelizes us with “holy joys.”

Dante in *The Divine Comedy* spoke about hope. At the entrance of hell, inscribed in dim colors above the doorway’s lofty arch, appeared a statement that caused Dante to shudder. Turning to his guide, the Roman Poet, Virgil, he said, “Master, these words import hard meaning.” Hard meaning, indeed! “All hope abandon, ye who enter here” pronounce the very essence of hell – life without hope. People who exist without hope, whether, they are dead or alive, exist in hell. We are in the profoundest sense, creatures of hope. Not being able to hope is destructive to the soul and brings about unbearable torment.

We should not confuse ultimate hope with our trivial hopes. We hope the weather is good for the picnic, or that our team will win the championship, or that the next assignment will be a plum! But ultimate hope transcends all of our trivial hopes. It is the hope that transcends our earthy life. Because we are always unfinished and unfulfilled, we are constantly hoping for a better state. This hope does not expire with age. We need difficulties to enliven our hope, patience to test it, a community to support it, and God to direct it. God is at work in our lives during this Easter Season. During this global pandemic you can rest assured that the ultimate Christian hope is not a mere platitude. It is when everything seems hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all. God evangelizes us during the Easter Season through our hope for the prize of immortality. It is important for us to keep our eyes on the prize!

“Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love....” The prayer of the Holy Spirit illustrates the action of the Holy Spirit and the Catechism of the Church unpacks for us the Mystery of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, the Easter Season comes to an end and Christ’s Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church. Love is the catalyst! “God is Love” and love is his first gift, containing all others. God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. God takes the initiative and loves us first; and we are evangelized by this love as we become aware of it and respond to it. This love is the source of our new life in Christ, made possible because we have received “power” from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps a person live a Christian life:

- The Spirit is our helper and guide – it helps us on earth as it guides us to heaven.
- The Spirit helps us to understand what Jesus taught – and keeps us faithful to his teachings.
- The Spirit of Truth helps us in our choices and discernment – and keeps us in a state of grace.
- The Spirit helps believers relate to each other – it holds the community together.
- The Spirit helps believers relate to God – it inspires us to worship in the one true faith.

- The Spirit guides us to where we can be of service – in our Church, and in our neighborhood.
- The Spirit helps us to be Church – missionary disciples for the New Evangelization.

Cardinal James A. Hickey, a former Archbishop of Washington, DC, used to tell this story. After the Ascension, Jesus was seated at the right hand of the Father and an angel came over and said to him,

Angel: “Jesus, you were supposed to be the Light of the World. Well, I am looking at the World and it is still a very dark place.”

Jesus then looked at the angel and asked, “Can you see Jerusalem?”

The angel responded, “Yes, I can see a few lights flickering in Jerusalem.”

Jesus then explained to the angel, “Well, those are my disciples and they have just received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They now have the fire of God’s love in their hearts and they will soon carry this love and the light of Christ to all the Nations of the World.”

The angel thought about it for a moment and then asked Jesus, “Lord, what is plan B?”

Jesus answered, “Amen, I say to you there is no other plan. This is going to work, I have faith in my disciples, I have faith in my Church!”

The global pandemic has covered the world in the darkness of anxiety, sickness and death. But compassion, love, kindness, and silent service continue to let the light of Christ shine in the darkness. The light of Christ shines forth through the charity of disciples, through loving Christian families, and through the Churches that remain bastions of God’s presence and grace in our neighborhoods. The light of Christ is definitely shining on the battlefield in our hospitals where heroic health care providers risk their health and lives to perform corporal works of mercy for patients infected with the New Coronavirus. Love endures, and the light of Christ shines!

My Knights and Dames-in-Christ Easter is for you! God loves you and your families, and during the Easter Season he uses the Mysteries of Salvation to evangelize you. God’s purpose is to strengthen your faith, increase your hope, and help you to live on in the love that Jesus has for you. St. Augustine was credited with having said, “We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.” You are the Easter People of your families and friends. And you give marvelous witness to the Risen Christ by living lives characterized by the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love. May almighty God pour out his abundant Easter Blessings upon you and your families! Alleluia!