

Homily Easter 2018

One of the projects I recently undertook at my property across the water was to, pardon the expression, resurrect an old small raspberry patch. Over the last number of years it had not been tended and so salmon berries took over the space. And if you know salmon berries you know that they are bland tasting and very seedy. They grow into shrubs and are hard to remove. They are not like the sweeter, less seedy raspberry which produces new canes for each year. So now I have several dozen tall raspberry canes, held up by bamboo stakes. Even with the late and slow spring I see the liberated plant coming to life. Small buds will become branches with leave, blossoms and berries. Newly exposed to the sun, with less competition for water and ground nutrients we will have a more abundant harvest that will be easier to pick. I never cease to wonder and even be amazed at how hidden within the core of a plant, perhaps a seed in the ground, there is this rich life only waiting to grow. It is only waiting for that combination of light, heat, water and natural nutrients in order to expand and bear fruit. So much life lies deep within a seed or seemingly lifeless stock.

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The event of nearly 2000 years ago is categorically different from my exposing and assisting my raspberry plants. Nevertheless, my experience with nature does help visualize or appreciate the broader message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as it is supposed to impact each one of us. That event was dramatic, instantaneous, and complete. Jesus had truly died. He was laid lifeless in the tomb. And then the women and the apostles approached the tomb, as the Gospel noted, He was not there. But the Gospel testimony does point to the faith of the apostles. They noted the order of the burial cloths and concluded a deliberate act of resurrection rather than some other explanation. Other Gospel accounts describe the later actual physical encounters with Jesus that further confirmed that He who once was dead was alive. He was visible. He ate with them. But He did appear in a new transformed human body.

In our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles we have a portion of a sermon that St. Peter preached some time after Jesus had ascended into heaven and the apostles had received the Holy Spirit. The sermon was addressed to a non-Jew, a Roman centurion who was interested in converting to belief in Jesus Christ as the divine redeemer. It captures the ancient Christian recognition that Jesus' resurrection set into motion the spreading of the word about Jesus, the word about the forgiveness of sins. As the passage goes beyond the section read today, we learn that the centurion Cornelius and all his

family were baptized, having their sins washed away and being reborn as the adopted children of God.

Our second reading from St. Paul expands on the message. He spoke of our being raised with Christ and therefore that all should seek what is above. What is above is Jesus Christ, reigning victorious in heaven. But even now, while on earth, St. Paul tells us, we live a new life hidden, within Christ, in God.

We experience our individual and personal application of Jesus' resurrection in our baptism. As with Jesus' resurrection it is instantaneous, it is total. We are made new creatures, sharing in the divine, having God's Holy Spirit within us. We are adopted as God's own children.

Nevertheless, baptism is only the beginning of that new life. Like my little raspberry patch, the new life of baptism, within each one us, must be cared for, it must be nurtured. It must be exposed to the light of Christ, the constant teaching of the truths He has revealed. The new life of our baptism must receive the water and nurturance of grace, especially as it is found in our sacraments and the celebration of the Eucharist. And like my raspberries that joyous and powerful life can be held back and deadened by things that block the light or prevent us from drinking fully of the grace that Jesus offers us. But with the promise of new life in the Easter message is the promise that Jesus stands always ready to lift us up anew. Through His Church He offers the tools that bring light and grace.

The fact of an annual season of Lent, a time of personal review and renewal, is an acknowledgment of how easily we can become distracted from following Jesus completely. We don't allow Him to enlighten and water and feed us, to lift our minds heavenward. We are constantly in need of renewal and recommitment to the resurrected Jesus. And so in all the Masses of Easter Sunday we renew our baptismal promises. We recall how Jesus reached out to give us new birth in our original baptism, and now we ask Him to bless us anew. He only asks that we cooperate with all those ways He does seek to bless us.