

Easter Sunday 2006

A young adult was complaining to her dad one day about all the trials and difficulties she was going through in her life: job difficulties, relationship difficulties, apartment problems, car problems. As they sat in the kitchen, her dad put on three pots, and placed into the first one a carrot, into the second one an egg, and into the third one, one of those coffee bags that you boil. After he putzed around at the stove for a few minutes, they continued talking, and after awhile the father brought over the cooked carrot, the boiled egg, and a cup of coffee. He asked his daughter if she understood what he was trying to show her; she admitted that his actions didn't make a lot of sense, at least on the surface. He explained, that the boiling water is like the adversity of life which all of us face in various shapes and forms. The carrot, he pointed out, went into the water hard, and rigid; but the boiling water changed it, and it came out soft and mushy, easy to break; in fact, cooked long enough, it can fall apart in the water. The egg, he noted, went into the water extremely fragile and easy to crack; the boiling water made it tough, and hard; in fact, it would no longer ever be cracked open and *poured* out of its shell again. But notice the coffee you're drinking, the dad said to his daughter. The coffee grounds that went in are a little bit different, a bit soggy now, but more than the water changing them, they changed the water. The others left their water brackish, but still water. The ground up coffee beans transformed the water, and changed it more than it changed them. So it would be with the adversity which life presents to her, the father said. The world can break you, and the world can harden you; or, depending on how you deal with the trials and tribulations of life, you can change the world instead.

There has been no greater injustice, and no more profound adversity, than that experienced by our Lord in his passion and death. No greater injustice, because of his unique sinlessness, coupled with the travesty of his unjust execution. No more profound adversity, because of the fact that he is God, and did not have to endure man's struggles at all, and would have been free to leave us to our own devices, leave us to the consequences of our own sins. He was the stone rejected by the builders, the God made man who was rejected by his own creation, rejected by the very people whom he came to save. And as the reading from the Acts of the Apostles reminds us, "he went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, and they put him to death by hanging him on a tree." This past week, we re-entered the mystery of our Lord's passion and death, and saw again how he dealt with the adversity of dealing with man. How easy it would have been for him to simply give up on us; how many times he had the power within himself to return to his Father, return to his home in heaven, to just say "enough. No more. No more of this pain, no more of this rejection." How many times he could have become hardened, and filled with hatred: at the mockery of the soldiers, the

revilement of the thieves, at the ridicule of the Scribes and Pharisees, at the indifference of Pontius Pilate. [Pause] How often do we carry feelings of hatred over the slightest of provocations? Or maybe even over true injustices, all the while losing sight of how often we have been the perpetrators of injustice ourselves? Maybe *we* give up, but Jesus never gave up, and he never turned to hatred of his persecutors. Satan would have been delighted with either one, either Jesus giving up or giving himself to hatred, Satan particularly wanted the second, but either one would have sufficed; Jesus would deliver neither to him, but instead persevered to the end, persevered in both his suffering, and in his love: love for his Father, and love for the creation he came to redeem.

And as a result, Jesus changed the world that Easter morning. We might ask, what changed? What's really different? First, by rising from the dead, Jesus changed the meaning of death itself. Before this morning, it meant the end of life as we know it; now, it means the beginning of life as God wants us to know it. Before, man viewed death as the end of existence, now we know it to be the bridge which will carry us to a new and everlasting life, free of pain and adversity. Second, Easter morning changed the possibility for man to go to heaven. Before, he had belief, possibly, but no real reason to hope; by rising from the dead, Jesus opened up for us the possibility of living with God in his abode, to which we have no claim and in which we could not live, except for living there as members of the Mystical Body of our Lord. Third, on Easter, he opened up the floodgates not only of Heaven, but also of grace: through the sacramental life of his Church, we now have the forgiveness of sins, for as many times as we repent of them and turn back to him with our whole hearts. We receive the strength to follow more closely God's laws, and live in his love. But most of all, we have the ability to receive sanctifying grace, to receive God's own life within us; receive the capacity to love him and know him, and to increase that capacity throughout the course of our lives; and that capacity to love God increases through all the sacraments. On Easter morning, a disbelieving world heard the news of the empty tomb, but refused to believe what it meant; those who had allowed their hearts to be hardened couldn't see their salvation at hand. And a hardened world will still today try to resist this good news, that God came, God conquered, and that now he saves us and gives us new life. It's the same old, bitter, cruel world today for many; for us of faith, it's a glorious world filled with promise and hope, promise and hope which should dwarf the trials and pains which are still among us.

As Jesus changed the world with his resurrection, so should Easter change us. Because sometimes we do weaken over time, and life does threaten to break us; but the promise of Easter gives us the strength to persevere, because we continue to have hope in a better life to come. And sometimes the world does begin to harden us, especially harden us to the presence of sin in our lives; but Easter provides us with the motivation to change,

because we believe that nothing that this life has to offer can match what God holds in store for us in his kingdom of heaven. Heaven knows the world will try to change us, but Easter is our call to change the world instead. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?” When we refuse to give in to Satan’s promptings, refuse to give in to selfishness, refuse to succumb to despair, we begin to change the world around us. Those who reject the Good News may not accept that the tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead, but they can never deny that what John, and Peter, and Mary Magdalen, saw on that Easter morning changed them; and that from their witness arose a Church, founded by Christ, that has endured through two thousand years; as Jesus’ resurrection changed everything, so did their witness, and so now may ours. And many of us are here today because of somebody else’s specific witness to their beliefs. Perhaps that Easter day, it seemed to be but only a small bit of leaven, but look at how it spread, to every corner of the world, to all generation after it.

Easter is the day when we see the empty tomb through the witness of the Church; see, and believe, that this is the miracle of all miracles. It is the day when the first believers saw, and were changed; now we, the believers today, must change the world by living as a people whose life is only beginning here, but is mostly pointed towards heaven. It is the day when others saw, and they witnessed; now, ours is to tell the Good News by forgiving, and loving, and serving others as Jesus did, and as he commanded us to do if we love him. It is the day when his followers saw, and recovered hope; and that same hope is celebrated every where in the world today. Be not like the carrot, which encountered the boiling water and was then easily crushed; and be not like the egg, which encountered the boiling waters and then became hardened. Be like the coffee grounds, which accepted the boiling water as that which would help it to meet its true destiny, and in doing so changed the water into something else. Live like a people who are in a post-resurrection world, where the empty tomb means life, the cross means hope, and we are a sign to the world, that a better world is yet to come.

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