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Holy Father

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"He is Risen, He is Not Here"
excerpt from Easter Vigil Homily, April 15, 2006
 Pope Benedict XVI

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But somehow the Resurrection is situated so far beyond our horizon, so far outside all our experience that, returning to ourselves, we find ourselves continuing the argument of the disciples: Of what exactly does this "rising" consist? What does it mean for us, for the whole world and the whole of history? A German theologian once said ironically that the miracle of a corpse returning to life - if it really happened, which he did not actually believe - would be ultimately irrelevant precisely because it would not concern us. In fact, if it were simply that somebody was once brought back to life, and no more than that, in what way should this concern us? But the point is that Christ's Resurrection is something more, something different. If

we may borrow the language of the theory of evolution, it is the greatest "mutation", absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order which does concern us, and concerns the whole of history.

The discussion, that began with the disciples, would therefore include the following questions: What happened there? What does it mean for us, for the whole world and for me personally? Above all: what happened? Jesus is no longer in the tomb. He is in a totally new life. But how could this happen? What forces were in operation? The crucial point is that this man Jesus was not alone, he was not an "I" closed in upon itself. He was one single reality with the living God, so closely united with him as to form one person with him. He found himself, so to speak, in an embrace with him who is life itself, an embrace not just on the emotional level, but one which included and permeated his being. His own life was not just his own, it was an existential communion with God, a "being taken up" into God, and hence it could not in reality be taken away from him. Out of love, he could allow himself to be killed, but precisely by doing so he broke the definitiveness of death, because in him the definitiveness of life was present. He was one single reality with indestructible life, in such a way that it burst forth anew through death. Let us express the same thing once again from another angle. His death was an act of love. At the Last Supper he anticipated death and transformed it into self-giving. His existential communion with God was concretely an existential communion with God's love, and this love is the real power against death, it is stronger than death. The Resurrection was like an explosion of light, an explosion of love which dissolved the hitherto indissoluble compenetration of "dying and becoming". It ushered in a new dimension of being, a new dimension of life in which, in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges.

It is clear that this event is not just some miracle from the past, the occurrence of which could be ultimately a matter of indifference to us. It is a qualitative leap in the history of "evolution" and of life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself. But how does this happen? How can this event effectively reach me and draw my life upwards towards itself? The answer, perhaps surprising at first but totally real, is: this event comes to me through faith and Baptism. For this reason Baptism is part of the Easter Vigil, as we see clearly in our celebration today, when the sacraments of Christian initiation will be conferred on a group of adults from various countries. Baptism means precisely this, that we are not dealing with an event in the past, but that a qualitative leap in world history comes to me, seizing hold of me in order to draw me on.

Q & A

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"Open Your Heart to the Wake-Up Call"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

My 16-year-old daughter is wondering if she may have a vocation as a nun. Can you help her? As a family, we have been inconsistent in practice recently, yet she still feels drawn. Any advice for Mom? Thank you.

-A Mom

A. Dear Mom,

As you can see, a vocation is a gift that God gives freely.

My first advice is that you open your heart to this wakeup call as regards your family's life of faith. If the family has slipped in its practice recently, your daughter's vocation may be God's blessing on your previous efforts and his gentle nudge back to where you belong. The beauty (and at times drama) of the call is going to be played out between your daughter and Christ, but there is no doubt that your prayer and the understanding of the vocation that will come with your returning closer to Christ is going to be a great help and support for her.

If she is interested in a particular order help her to get to know them better, give her the opportunity to go and visit, and perhaps do a retreat. Make sure she continues to grow in a sense of responsibility and she has healthy activity. Continue to protect her from whatever could harm her spiritually. And also, make sure she understands the beauty and goodness of married life so she will realize also the beautiful gift she will give God if she is called to be a nun.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

I am a 21yr old student at a secular university. Over the past year I have come to hear God's call to priesthood and I have talked with my diocesan vocations director about entering the seminary. I feel a very strong call to serve God as a priest and I find myself anxious to enter seminary. However, I am a college junior and I was advised by my vocations director to finish my secular degree. I see the wisdom in this, it is important to be prepared for life if my calling is not true, and I am only a year away from graduation. My question is, with one year left until I graduate, I find that I have trouble concentrating on my studies and yearning for that seminary experience. How can I keep focus on my secular education, something I do value, and keep my urge for seminary at a healthy level?

-Nate

A. Dear Nate,

Make the priesthood more and more the center of your life.

Don't think to yourself that you will start studying for the priesthood when you enter the seminary in more than a year's time. Begin now. Take as many credits as you can carry well, even if it's more than you are required.

Why? Because it will enrich your preparation for the priesthood. Don't look on your studies as something you are doing just in case you don't have a vocation. They are part of God's path for you to the priesthood.

At the same time, develop and deepen your prayer-life - this will keep you from getting discouraged and will give you the spiritual drive and motivation to do as well as you can. And, get involved in the parish, teach CCD next year, start or help out in the youth group, etc. That will teach you a lot, and you might even bring someone else into the seminary with you next year.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand'. 'Never!' said Peter 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing common with me'. 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, everything you thought, said, and did was directed by one intention; to lead all people to Your heavenly Father. Your whole life was an open book revealing who God is. This Lent I have tried to know understand Your Father and His will in my life. As this Lent comes to an end I

vow not to end my journey to know, love, and serve you with my whole heart.

Petition: Lord, grant me the tiniest spark from the fire that blazes in your heart, to set my own heart on fire and bring me to give myself as generously as you.

1. With their eyes. For the disciples Jesus Christ was no ordinary man. He commanded wind and water, he was the healer of sickness, demons cringed before him, no man's heart was hidden from his piercing glance... In a word Jesus Christ was for them the Messiah, the Son of God. So when Christ rose from the table and went to each of them, stooping to wash their feet, the apostles remained dumbfounded. They were men from a world where the great ones made their greatness felt, but now they were learning first hand that it was to be different among them.

2. Lord, will you wash my feet? Silently the bewildered disciples permitted the master to stoop down, unfasten their sandals and cleanse their feet in the basin of water which he carried. One by one he went down the line, not saying anything, knowing that no words were needed for the message that he was giving them.

Peter was down the line. He thought about what he would say when Christ came to him. He wanted to say something that would show his love and respect for Christ, that would reflect his fidelity and devotion. He had time to think how extraordinary Christ's action was. Lord, Will you wash my feet? Little did he understand at that moment love meant following the Master wherever he would lead.

3. He came not to be served but to serve. If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me. Christ's words stung Peter's impetuous heart as they did on the occasion when Christ told him, "Get behind me Satan". At that time Peter had been trying to convince the master that he should not suffer and die. This time he was trying to turn Jesus from doing his Father's will - to serve and not to be served - again, although more subtly.

It would take Peter some time to understand this lesson and that he, as a follower of Christ, was called to walk in his master's footsteps. Christ came to serve. As we follow the Holy Week liturgy, it will only become more and more apparent that he came on earth to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Am I ready to follow him?

Conversation: Lord Jesus, I behold you stooped, washing the feet of your disciples. I also want to be clean. And Lord, I want to follow your example. Help me to stoop beside you and humble myself as you did, serving others. Help me to stay close beside you as we relive the days in which you gave your life as a ransom for me and for all my brothers and sisters.

Questionnaire:

1. Am I willing to give up everything in order to follow Christ unencumbered? What do I still hold onto?
2. What lessons from the life of Christ do I find hardest to assimilate and imitate?
3. Who is it hardest for me to serve? How can I come down from my pedestal today to follow Christ's example of humble service?

Meditation - Good Friday

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"The Crucified's Friends"
John 18:1 - 19:42

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After he had said all this, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron valley where there was a garden into which he went with his disciples. Judas the traitor knew the place also, since Jesus had often met his disciples there, so Judas brought the cohort to this place together with guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns and torches and weapons. Knowing everything that was to happen to him, Jesus came forward and said, "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said, "I am he." Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they moved back and fell on the ground. He asked them a second time, "Who are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus replied, "I have told you that I am he. If I am the one you want, let these others go." This was to fulfill the words he had spoken, "Not one of those you gave me have I lost." Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in its scabbard; am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" The cohort and the tribune and the Jewish guards seized Jesus and bound him. They took him first to Annas, because Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews, "It is better for one man to die for the people." Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, but Peter stayed outside the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the door-keeper, and brought Peter in. The girl on duty

at the door said to Peter, "Aren't you another of that mans disciples?" He answered, "I am not." Now it was cold, and the servants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were standing there warming themselves, so Peter stood there too, warming himself with the others. The high priests questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews meet together; I have said nothing in secret. Why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught, they know what I said." At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying, "Is that the way you answer the high priest?" Jesus replied, "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. As Simon Peter stood there warming himself, someone said to him, "Aren't you another of his disciples?" He denied it saying, "I am not." One of the high priests servants, a relation of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at once a cock crowed.

They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves to avoid being defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So Pilate came outside to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?" They replied, "If he were not a criminal, we should not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and try him by your own Law." The Jews answered, "We are not allowed to put anyone to death." This was to fulfill the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way he was going to die. So Pilate went back into the Praetorium and called Jesus to him and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others said it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? It is your own people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?" Jesus replied, "Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the Jews. As it is, my kingdom does not belong here". Pilate said, "So then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "It is you who say I am a king. I was born for this; I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice." "Truth?" said Pilate. "What is that?" And so saying he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no case against him. But according to a custom of yours, I should release one prisoner at the Passover; would you like me, then, to release to you the king of the Jews?" At this they shouted, "Not this man," they said, "but Barabbas." Barabbas was a bandit. Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him and saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and slapping him in the face. Pilate came outside again and said to them, "Look, I am going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case against him." Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, "Here is the man." When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and crucify him: I find no case against him." The Jews replied, "We have a Law, and according to that Law he ought to be put to death, because he claimed to be Son of God." When Pilate heard them say this, his fears increased. Reentering the Praetorium, he said to Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him, "Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know I have the power to release you and I have power to crucify you!" Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above; that is why the man who handed me over to you has the greater guilt." From that moment Pilate was anxious to set him free, but the Jews shouted, "If you set him free you are no friend of Caesar's; anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar." Hearing these words, Pilate had Jesus brought out, and seated him on the chair of judgment at a place called the Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was the Day of Preparation, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," said Pilate to the Jews. But they shouted, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." Pilate said, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So at that Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull or, as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him with two others, one on either side, Jesus being in the middle. Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it ran: Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews. This notice was read by many of the Jews, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the writing was in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, "You should not write 'King of the Jews';" but that the man said, 'I am King of the Jews'. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem; so they said to one another, "Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it." In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed and, so that the scripture should be completely fulfilled, he said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine stood there; so putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a hyssop stick, they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished, and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit." It was the Day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies remaining on the cross during the Sabbath - since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity - the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfill the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken; and again, in another place scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced. After this, Joseph of Arimathaea, who was a disciple of Jesus though a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews asked Pilate

to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well the same one who had first come to Jesus at nighttime and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden there was a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Introductory Prayer: Lord, you willed to die for me so that I can be with you forever yet I still struggle with the temptations in the world that distract me from you. You give me great hope in your death. The depth of your love as witnessed in your forgiveness and willingness to die is hard for me to grasp. This Lent I have tried even harder to unite myself to your pain through my sacrifices I pray for the grace to remain with you at the foot of the cross with Mary and John, suffering with you as you undergo the crucifixion for my salvation.

Petition: Lord, never permit be to be separated from you.

1. Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. Only two disciples are with our Lord once Jesus is arrested. The other nine have fled, for they were afraid. Peter and the other disciple can only watch from a distance. They cannot physically be with our Lord. They follow with curiosity, but not with the passion and conviction as on that first day he called them, when they left their boats - their security. But this is a moment in which Our Lord is almost too human. He needs us to be with him now more than ever. How lonely he must feel in this moment of trial! How much anguish he is enduring, and how much harder for him having no one to turn to.

2. Woman, this is your son. This is your mother. Lord, you are about to leave us, but you refuse to abandon us forever. You want us to be with you through Mary, our mother who will care for us and keep us close to you, protecting us under her mantle and showing us the way to you. Who is there to turn to in this moment but our Blessed Mother? Anyone who wants to be close to you, Lord, needs to be a faithful child of Mary, following the example of faith, obedience and simplicity that she gives us.

3. It is finished; and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit. The Lord gives the greatest example ever of heroism, persevering until death on the cross to glorify the Father and save us. If we are united to the Lord we will find in him the strength to go to the end; and say as St Paul. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim 4, 7) What awaits anyone united to Christ who finishes the race is the crown of uprightness which the Lord will give on that day. (2 Tim 4, 8) Going to the end means going to the cross, a cross that will save us.

Conversation: Lord Jesus, you have willed to unite me to you, to the cross, a cause of scandal to some and folly to others. I know that there are few who follow you all the way to Calvary, but I promise that I shall never leave you. I want to be with you until the end, and I pray that you will grant me the grace to be like Mary who remains there, even when all may seem lost and hopeless, there at the foot of the cross.

Questionnaire:

1. When and where do I tend to leave Christ alone, and just "look on from a distance"?
2. Where or when do I succumb to fear?
3. What can I do to be a faithful child of Mary? In what virtue can I imitate her better so as to be more united to Christ?

Meditation - Holy Saturday

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"A Christian Only Rents a Tomb"
Mark 16: 1-7

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When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back: it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are my faithful friend in life and in death. May I discover in your resurrection my guarantee and hope of everlasting life.

Petition: Lord, Jesus, I believe. Help my little faith so I can follow you as someone who really hopes that some day he will climb out of the tomb to live in joy with you forever.

1. In the Middle of Darkness. Mary and the other women were without hope. Jesus was dead. The only thing left was to give him a proper burial. They had been in a rush on Friday evening because of the impending Sabbath. Now they could do things properly. It would be hard to see him again, to look at that now expressionless face they had known so well, to anoint the cold stiff flesh of the one who had meant everything to them. Once the anointing was done what would they do? What would be the future of this group Jesus had gathered around him? They had even heard that some members of the group were leaving today, to return to their homes because now that Jesus was dead, everything was over. It was now meaningless to be his follower. It was hard to believe that it was really all over, but that seemed to be the truth they had to face.

2. An Unexpected Light Dawns. In the middle of their doubt, in the middle of their sorrow, in the middle of their hopelessness, a ray of light enters that grows to blinding proportions. They expected an obstacle in the stone; but the stone is gone, rolled back. How could that have happened? They hurry into the tomb, fearing the worst, but the tomb is filled with light instead of darkness. How? A man...? No, an angel! He is smiling at them. He gives a message of unbelievable good news. Jesus is risen! He will see you in Galilee! This is really unbelievable, they think to themselves. People don't rise from the dead. But somehow the angel's impossible words bring them comfort, peace and even belief. In their hearts they know that the impossible has really come true.

3. A New Perspective on Everything. The angel has given them a mission. They are to announce the Resurrection to the others. They have a message and they know it is of the deepest importance. Jesus, their hope, is alive. As they head toward the Upper Room, their minds start to work on the startling news they have received and they begin to understand many other things about Jesus. They remember how he spoke about having to suffer and die, but that he would rise. How strange they didn't listen before. It seems so obvious now. The truth of the Resurrection makes everything new. They know they will have to live their lives differently from now on.

Conversation: Lord Jesus, if I really believed in your Resurrection I would not act like I do full of selfishness, vanity and sensuality. If I really believed that you could raise me from the dead, I wouldn't doubt that you could make a saint out of me. If I really believed that this life is a preparation for the next, I would put a lot more into pleasing you more every day. But in a lot of ways, I don't really believe all that. Help me to realize that real faith comes from the heart, not the head. It isn't merely accepting that something is true. It is accepting it in such a way that it changes my life, that I live like someone who believes that the consequences of my faith matter in my own life. Help me to believe that a Christian only rents his tomb and that his treasures are not stored up in this life, but the next.

Questionnaire:

1. Is there anything in my life that I need to leave behind, anything that prevents me from having a closer relationship with Christ?
2. Do I feel Christ speaking to my heart about my future, about something that I may not be expecting in my life?
3. What can I do differently starting today to begin living my God-given mission more fully?

Meditation - Easter Sunday

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"Death Where is Your Sting?"
Jn 20: 1-9

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It was very early in the first day of the week, and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, she said, and we don't know where they have put him. So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linens lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, together with the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they still had not understood the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Introductory Prayer: Lord, you rose from the dead for me, so that I could be with you forever. Help me to experience the reality and joy of the Resurrection - to see the stone rolled away from the empty tomb - so that I may live the Resurrection united to you, believing that with you I can do all things.

Petition: Lord, change my life through the power of the Resurrection.

1. "The Stone Had Been Moved Away from the Tomb." Christ is alive. If God is with us who is against us, St. Paul asked. Christ is alive for me; he died so that we may live. The cross is not the end. Looking at the cross without seeing the Resurrection is like living without hope. Christ came to give us hope, and it is this hope that we experience when we see the stone rolled away from the tomb, knowing that he conquered even death.

2. "Death, Where Is Your Sting?" If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be given life again by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin (Romans 6:5-6). Christ rose from the dead so as to roll the stone away from our tomb, to erase our sin, to usher in grace and virtue. He rose from the dead so that we may have the grace to conquer our pride and vanity, our sloth and laziness, so as to be forever with him. Now all things are new. With Christ we have conquered death. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting (Romans 15:55)?

3. "He Saw, and He Believed." *Christ's Resurrection is more than a fact that we celebrate; it is something we believe in deeply. It's a belief in which we commend our entire selves to God - mind, heart, will, and soul, submitting all of our faculties to him* (cf. Dei Verbum, 5). John's encounter with the linens in the tomb changed his life from within, and the Resurrection has the power to do the same in our own lives. Belief in the Resurrection is more than just accepting that Christ rose from the dead. I have to make an effort in my own life to believe in what it can do for me, that I too can be transformed, that I too can be recognizable to others as one now living a life of virtue with God's grace. Like St. Paul I too can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Conversation: Lord Jesus, you rose from the dead, and I want to rise with you. I want this celebration of your Resurrection to be one where I change, where I roll the stone back from the tomb of my life so as to change and be more like you, living as I ought. With you I can do all things, and I believe that this Easter can make a difference in my life.

Questionnaire:

1. What in my life keeps the stone from being moved: Pride? Fear? Laziness?
2. What must I change in my life so as to rise with the Lord?
3. What can I do to live as one who believes in the Resurrection?

Let us look at our lives in another light, and let us learn or relearn to relish in simplicity the numerous human joys that the Creator has placed in our path: the jubilant joy of existence and life; the joy of chaste and holy love; the calming joy of nature and silence; the perhaps austere joy of conscientious work; the joy and the satisfaction of doing our duty; the transparent joy of purity, service and cooperation; the demanding joy of sacrifice. A Christian will be able to complete and elevate these joys, but they presuppose in him the natural capacity to perceive them. And only when he enters fully into the presence of God and radically cuts himself off from sin, can someone truly possess spiritual happiness. Certainly flesh and blood cannot, for this joy comes from grace and from revelation, from knowing you are a child of God; but a person torn between grace and sin will never be capable of a true smile.

You know of course that due to our triple concupiscence we all seem to be remotely controlled toward what is worldly, with its good and not so good sides. But by the grace of God, Christ has called us; he called out our names and we have at our disposal all the strength and capacity we need to take a step forward, and happily and generously say yes to Christ. A thousand difficulties and problems of every sort may still lie ahead but the die has been cast, our fundamental option has been made. The cross of Christ is our victory and we can proclaim to the world with St. Paul that we know in whom we have put our trust and to whom we have given ourselves.

God loves a cheerful giver. You are young, living a tremendous chapter of life overflowing with energy, dreams, hopes. Don't grow prematurely old in the spirit; don't commit the sin of atheism, wrecking your youth, sacrificing your joy and happiness on the altars of indecision, bitterness and anxiety. Remember that Satan roams like a lion, seeking whom to devour. He attacks from all sides encouraging obsessions, killing your joy, sowing nostalgia, distancing souls from God, creating bitterness and trying to destroy the treasure of merits your fidelity accrues. The positive and constructive spirit of your vocation is made concrete in one person --Christ; in one love --souls; in one mission --Christ's Kingdom. When you love everything changes, everything becomes light, everything becomes certainty; nothing you give seems a waste; every way you can give yourself seems too little.

"It's Confession Time"

Dioceses Nationwide Promoted the Sacrament of Penance This Lent
Jeff Ziegler, Register Correspondent

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NEW YORK — Holy Week is the culmination of Lent, a time to repent, confess and come to Easter renewed. U.S. dioceses have been offering increased opportunities for the "confess" part.

The Cathedral of Saint Patrick Young Adults in New York is one of them. With the Archdiocese of New York, it sponsored 24 Hours of Confession at St. Patrick's Cathedral and 20 Manhattan parishes on the first Friday and Saturday of March.

"Thousands upon thousands of Catholics line up to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday each year," said Mario Bruschi, the co-director of the young adults group. "Imagine if these same thousands of Catholics line up for confession? It could be a tremendous day for Our Lord."

The following weekend, none other than Pope Benedict XVI spoke in support of such efforts. The Pope called the administration of the sacrament of penance an "indispensable ministry" that aids the faithful along the "demanding road of sanctity."

He made the remarks in a March 14 message he sent to Cardinal James Stafford, major penitentiary, and to participants in the 20th Internal Forum, an annual course on matters of conscience.

During his Sunday Angelus address on Feb. 15, the Holy Father prayed: "Let us invoke the Virgin Mary, whom God preserved from every stain of sin, so that she may help us to avoid sin and to have frequent recourse to the sacrament of confession."

According to recent surveys, millions of Catholics in the United States need to rediscover the sacrament's value and importance.

A February 2008 survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University found that only 61% of Catholics who attend Mass weekly go to confession once a year or more. For Catholics who attend Mass less than once a week but at least monthly, the figure is even lower (37%). Only 8% of Catholics who go to Mass infrequently have been to confession in the past year.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in No. 1468, teaches that "for those who receive the sacrament of penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation. Indeed the sacrament of reconciliation with God brings about a true 'spiritual resurrection,' restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God."

And the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in No. 305, reminds us that "each of the faithful who has reached the age of discretion is bound to confess his or her mortal sins at least once a year and always before receiving holy Communion."

Bruschi said the idea for 24 Hours of Confession came from a Wall Street Journal article that mentioned 24 Hours of Grace, a similar 2007 initiative in seven Chicago parishes.

Another 2007 initiative — "The Light Is on for You," sponsored by the Archdiocese of Washington — is also bearing fruit nationwide. In 2007 and 2008, all 140 Washington parishes held confessions from 7 to 8:30 on Wednesday evenings.

"We found if you invite, people will come, especially if you make it easy and make them feel welcome," said archdiocesan director of communications Susan Gibbs. "We ran ads on over 300 bus and subway cars, put up a giant billboard, ran radio ads, and printed 100,000 guides to confession in English and Spanish," she recalls. This Lent, the archdiocese is embarking on a major campaign to invite inactive Catholics back to the Church.

Welcome Home

Using television, radio, bus, billboard and print advertising, Archbishop Edwin O'Brien launched "The Light Is on for You" initiative in Baltimore to encourage Catholics to return to the sacrament, with all parishes holding confessions on Wednesday evenings.

"Archbishop O'Brien has observed the declining numbers of Catholics participating in the sacrament of

reconciliation and wanted a vehicle that would promote the benefits of the sacrament and the restoration of what Pope John Paul II called 'Eucharistic awe,'" said archdiocesan communication director Sean Caine. "The archbishop observed the success of this particular campaign in the Archdiocese of Washington and thought it would be a good model to replicate in the Archdiocese of Baltimore."

Other dioceses also launched Lenten confession campaigns similar to Washington's.

In Philadelphia, for the second consecutive year, Cardinal Justin Rigali asked priests of all 269 parishes to hear confessions every Wednesday evening during Lent.

The Diocese of Paterson, N.J., held confessions in all of its parishes on Monday evenings in March as part of its "Welcome Home to Healing" initiative. Likewise, in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Conn., the sacrament of reconciliation was available in all parishes every Tuesday evening in Lent as part of the Lenten Confession Campaign 2009.

Saturdays — when confessions are typically scheduled — "are often the times that families are busy with errands, shopping and sports," said Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson. After some of his priests successfully introduced weekday confession schedules, "I thought it might be worthwhile trying new ideas. With a priest available in every parish on the same day at the same hour and a half during Lent, not only is the sacrament more available, but there is a strong witness given by the priests themselves that this sacrament is important."

"This gift given to the Church by Jesus cannot be repeated anywhere else," added Bishop Serratelli, who chairs the Committee on Divine Worship of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Those who bypass or avoid this sacrament miss out on the graces and healing that God offers us in the sacrament instituted by Christ."

Prayer Support

Like the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Dioceses of Paterson and Bridgeport have promoted confession through extensive advertising campaigns. In Bridgeport, 40,000 prayer cards were distributed a month before Lent so that parishioners could pray for the Lenten initiative's success.

"Without prayer, no plan bears fruit," said Bridgeport Bishop William Lori. "The diocese has also distributed 100,000 pamphlets which provide an examination of conscience and step-by-step instructions on how to go to confession."

Other dioceses have placed special emphasis on confession this Lent. On April 3 and 4, 21 Orlando parishes hosted a Reconciliation Weekend; confessions were heard for eight hours. Since 2000, all of the parishes of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., have held Reconciliation Monday for six hours on the Monday of Holy Week. The Diocese of Arlington launched "Come Back to Me With All Your Heart," a campaign to encourage Catholics to go to confession.

In addition, "especially during the season of Lent, parishes have started to give more attention to this," said Msgr. Anthony Sherman, executive director of the bishops' conference Secretariat of Divine Worship. "In some instances, despite the smaller number of priests, an extended period of time has been offered to people to come to celebrate the sacrament."

Bishop Lori said that he hopes his campaign will lead to "the rediscovery of the mercy of God in the lives of thousands of people. For some, this rediscovery will lead back to the Church and her sacramental life. For others, it will be a reinvigoration of their Christian life of faith, worship, morality and prayer."

As he promotes confession in Manhattan, Mario Bruschi recalled that his own Christian life has been reinvigorated time and time again by the sacrament: "Whenever I felt lost, I would always seek confession from the Jesuit priests at my high school in New York City, Regis High School. And they were always available for us, even if they were rushing to a class or a meeting."

"A couple of years ago," he added, "I went on a retreat hosted by the Legionaries of Christ, and I made a general confession there that really had an effect on me. I felt renewed after that confession, but I also felt dedicated to avoid these sins in the future. I know Christ is there in that confessional box."

Article courtesy of National Catholic Register. Jeff Ziegler writes from Ellenboro, North Carolina.


Upcoming Events & Retreats


((Listed here are retreats directed by the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi members. For a listing of diocesan activities and other events, click [here](#) to go to the [vocation.com](#) website))

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Northeast

 Retreats for Men

 Retreats for Women

Mark Your Calendars! Test Your Call Weekends for the 2009 Calendar Year. Experience the novitiate in Cheshire, CT with retreats for young men ages 16-27 sponsored by the Legion of Christ. These weekend retreats combine time for personal reflection, preached meditations, conferences, and opportunities for confession and spiritual direction with the experience of the day to day life of the seminarians. For more information, please call Br. Francois at (800) 420-5409 or email vocation@legionaries.org. Dates in 2009: April 8-12, April 24-26, May 22-25, June 19-21, July 3-5, July 24-26, August 14-16, September 4-6, October 23-25, November 25-29, December 19-23, and December 26-30.

Test Your Call Weekends, Canada! Experience the novitiate in Cornwall, ON with retreats for young men ages 16-27 sponsored by the Legion of Christ. These weekend retreats combine time for personal reflection, preached meditations, conferences, and opportunities for confession and spiritual direction with the experience of the day to day life of the seminarians. April 9-12, 2009. For more information, please contact Br. Xavier Kleiner de Lance at xkleiner@legionaries.org or (001) 613-203-3776.

Holy Week Missions in Mexico! Door to door evangelization missions in Guadalajara, Mexico for young men ages 15-25. Spend 10 days spreading the faith like the first apostles. Training provided. Sponsored by the Legion of Christ. Cost \$550 plus airfare. For more information please contact Fr. Daniel Wilson at dwilson@legionaries.org or (914)409-2930.

REGNUM CHRISTI consecrated women

Holy Week Vocational Discernment Retreat. Greenville, RI. A vocational discernment convention featuring conferences, meditations, and opportunities for Mass, Confession and spiritual direction, for young women ages 16-30, interested in discerning a vocation to the consecrated life. Sponsored by the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi. April 8-13. For more information please contact Jill Swallow at vocation@inteducators.org or 401-949-2820.

Come and See Weekends. Spend a weekend with the consecrated women of Regnum Christi, learning about their life, spirituality and mission within the Church. Activities include: Talks/conferences about the Church, Regnum Christi, the Spiritual Life, and consecrated Life in Regnum Christi; a half-day retreat; opportunities for confession and Spiritual Direction; daily Mass and time for prayer, silence and reflection; sports and meals with the consecrated women; vocational panel: Questions & Answers with consecrated women. Ages 16-30. For more information, contact Jill Swallow at vocation@inteducators.org or 401-949-2820. 2009 dates: May 22-25, and July 10-13

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