

We Are an Easter People

By Peter Guzulaitis

Imagine the most fantastic and outlandish TRUE story that you have ever heard. Why did you believe it? When I am told true stories that are hard to believe, I accept their truth because I trust and know the storyteller. For nearly 2,000 years believers, through the Church, have been telling a whopper of a true story. Jesus Christ has risen!

Christ's resurrection changes all of human history — the power of death is at an end and we can live in hope. During the 50 days of Easter (until Pentecost, on June 12 this year), we journey with the first Christians as they come to terms with this fantastic account of Christ's coming back from the dead. Easter invites us to celebrate, connect our story of faith to that of the church, and to pass that on to others.

Praying is not just words. Easter calls us to take our prayer to the next level.

P**ay attention.** In Mass, the somberness of Lent is over, and we are invited to celebrate the Good News. The power of death and sin is at an end. We have entered a new age of history. When we come to church during the Easter season our attitude, posture and language are different.

ACTIVITY: Have your children name the differences in the words, the decorations, and our actions — all are different from any other time of year. The priest is wearing white and gold. Alleluia is proclaimed! We are sprinkled with the waters of baptism. Flowers are everywhere. For the next seven Sundays these will be a part of our liturgies. Between those Sundays, also pay attention to new life growing in the springtime. Paying attention helps see how the Resurrection changes each of us, and all of human history.

R**espond.** The sprinkling rite during the Easter liturgies reminds us that we are baptized Christians who joyfully respond to the Resurrection. During the Easter season we will hear about "doubting" Thomas, the Road to Emmaus and other stories that tell us of how Jesus' first disciples came to accept the reality of his resurrection.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops provides each reading of the Church year on its website (www.usccb.org/nab). Looking up the readings and taking 10 minutes or so to reflect on them helps us see that even Jesus' disciples had a hard time believing the tomb was empty and that Jesus conquered death. We will find that many of their doubts are the same as ours today. At Pentecost, the disciples reject their fear and doubts and proclaim the Good News. They become the witnesses we need to believe as we accept the truth of Christ's resurrection.

ACTIVITY: Respond to life's challenges by naming one thing you are afraid of. How will you overcome your fear?

A**ccept salvation!** Most of us are familiar with the phrase "Catholic guilt." We often can more easily name our faults than what we like about ourselves. The Resurrection reminds us that God sees past our sins to who we truly are. We are a good and graced people who do not need to allow sin and fault to define us. However, this grace is not cheap or easy. We are called to love as Jesus did. God sent Jesus to show us God's true desire — that we be one with one another and with him.

Accepting salvation means we see it is a gift given to us by God and are called to live this good news and, more importantly, share it just as the disciples did after Pentecost.

TAKEAWAY: God always sees who we truly are.

Y**ack!** The disciples of Jesus did not keep the story of salvation a secret. They boldly went out to share it with all people in the world. We are on the same mission today. As Catholics, we tend to keep our faith private and personal, but we can talk about it as time and opportunity allow. We don't need perfect words to share a moment when God touched our lives.

Several years ago, during the Easter season, I received a letter from an acquaintance who was thanking me for sharing the story of my faith with him. I hardly remembered the conversation, but it had helped him understand God in a new way. Sometimes, God's grace acts through us in ways we never know.

ACTIVITY: Talk as a family about how your faith defines you. Who are your faith role models? When do you struggle with faith?

