Transformation Doesn't End with Lent

Six and a half weeks ago on Ash Wednesday, we heard the words "Repent and Believe in the Gospel" as the ashes were placed on our foreheads.

What those words invited us to do was to take a look at our lives and ask ourselves some hard questions such as what we really believe in, where our priorities are, and what in our lives need fine tuning. When we get to Easter though, we celebrate hopefully having emerged from Lent a better person, but also aware that the transformation that we go through is life long. Jesus has triumphed over sin and death; we have the hope to follow Him to heaven. But the learning how to respond part is something that continues for a lot more than the 40 days of Lent.

Through the death of our Lord and His resurrection, Jesus changes death and helps us to see that life is eternal. But through the apostles, we see how they too are transformed into people who are so full of this hope for heaven and so much on fire for God that they boldly proclaim Christ crucified and risen. It's quite a contrast from where they were on Good Friday, scattered and hiding behind locked doors. The challenge for us is to let Jesus transform us, too.

For one, we have to remember that transformation for the Catholic Christian is a life-long event. On Ash Wednesday as we began Lent, some opted to give up things such as candy, etc. Those practices are well and fine, but the point of Lent was to ask ourselves questions such as "who am I?" and "where am I going in life" and "where's my focus" and "what's lacking?" Sin's effects are very subtle. Little by little though, sin damages our relationship with God and one another. Hence by giving something up and by focusing on becoming a better person, hopefully we were able to use Lent to do just that. Easter should fill us with joy, but we must remember that the process is ongoing.

With that in mind, continually challenge yourself to grow in the faith. It starts with Mass. By encountering Jesus in the Word and the Eucharist, we are given food for the journey. So much occupies our time these days, and while it's okay to be busy, our call is not to have the perfect job, the most awards, or tangible things. That's why it's so important to teach this to children too - that for all the sports leagues and school projects and things that fill up our schedules, there needs to be time for prayer, for learning about our faith, and it's so important for a family to center their life around God, not making Him just one of many other things. Coming to Mass today on Easter is a great start - but keep up the relationship with God daily.

Being a Christian is a 24/7/365 affair. The story of what Jesus did for us is the greatest love story ever told, and Easter, when our Lord triumphs over death, shows us that sin, death and darkness do not have the last word, but that God does. God wants a relationship with you, the question is do you want a relationship with Him? Our second reading says it best: "seek what is above." If you've been away from Mass for a while, please consider joining us to hear God's word and receive Him in the Eucharist each Sunday. You are always welcome here at Saint Joe's. If you have been "too busy" for

family lately, rekindle those connections. If you find your time is spent more on your own activities, make time for other people and for volunteering. Seek what is above, for the rest turns to ashes. Our bodies may turn to dust here on earth, but because of Jesus, our future can be so glorious - we just need to strive to find the way to heaven and help one another to do the same.

So, too, my hope is that what happens at Mass also transforms us to see God in one another. Some people are tough to love and see God in. As we grow closer to God, we also must challenge ourselves to think about how we treat one another. Jesus' first words when He meets the apostles after His resurrection are "peace be with you." There are so many ways we can bring peace to the world. How do we welcome people at Mass, especially when it's more crowded? How do we treat our family? Our coworkers? Our kid's little league coach or umpire? Or that person who always gets on our nerves? People who are politically different than us? People fill our lives. And yet we objectify them. We gossip about them. We yell at them or slander them. It's human nature, as I noted a couple of weeks ago when I preached on the woman caught in adultery. Jesus though shows us a better way, and that's why Mass and our faith must transform us. Remember the sign of peace at Mass isn't just an opportunity for a hand shake. It is symbolic of what we are called to do as we leave Mass and bring Jesus into the world.

I hope it's been a great Lent for you, but remember this is not the time to go back to old bad habits. We rejoice at Easter not for an Easter basket filled with chocolates, but because we ponder again the greatest love story ever told, remembering that we are loved unconditionally by our God and challenged to bring that love into the world not just for 40 days and 40 nights, but every day of our lives.

I hope that the first words of our Lord - Peace - is something that fills your heart and soul as you encounter the love of the risen Christ.

Easter Blessings,

Fr. Paul