

April 7, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

In our Easter Sunday celebrations we not only consider and reflect upon the depth of God's love, but we rejoice that we too have been given new life.

I write to thank you, for I have been given new life in my being with you. Perhaps no one is as privileged as I am to know the generosity, sacrifice, and devotion of so many who made these days and weeks leading up to and including our

Easter celebration so memorable and so profound. I am unable to thank you all by name here, but I hope through by the Grace of God, to be able to do this in the time allotted to me. Each time we gather I encounter in you the Risen Lord Jesus, present and with us. In the Sacred Scriptures proclaimed, in the sharing in His Body and Blood, and in the innumerable encounters outside our church buildings I have found in your faces, the face of the Risen Lord Jesus who loves me.

Sometimes, because of the nature of our liturgical celebrations, we might think that all we do on Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday is to look back on something that happened 2000 years ago in a small town in the Roman Empire. For me, however, it has been in our small churches of Marmora or Woodbine, the 'beach' in Beesley's Point, a hospital or nursing home room, or the open door to your home that I have found His Risen presence today, right now.

At the same time, while we have rejoiced in the new life that Christ has won for us, I have been most conscious of so many families who grieve loved-ones who are no longer with us. I find that for many, our Easter "Alleluia's" can be discordant to this pain of loss. As my brother priests and I prayed for all your loved ones who have gone before us this Easter, I also looked into the eyes of so many of you who carry a sacred loss.

In addition to my prayerful support and hopefully pastoral presence, I offer a 'Grief Support Group' facilitated by Mrs. Nicole O'Neill, beginning Thursday, April 18, at 7pm. Beginning this night, and for the following six weeks in the Church of the Resurrection extension, it is my hope that this Grief Support Group will offer a safe place to learn more about grieving and to learn how to help and how to be helped during this difficult time.

This Grief Support Group is for all those who have lost a loved one in death, whether recently or years ago, and who are willing to share their pain and grief with other caring people. These weeks together intend to provide an opportunity to understand our reaction to death and the process of grieving and healing. It is a process in which one begins to find the steps of rebuilding life without a loved one so that we might better walk in the peace and newness of life that our Easter faith proclaims.

In all of our Easter celebrations I am conscious that I am blessed to share in that work of God which is always about bringing new life out of death. In these days of Easter may all of us draw near to the Risen and Glorified Christ so that he may show us the way to new and eternal life. Amen, Alleluia!

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce

March 31, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

“ . . . he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place” (John 20:6-7).

Saint John makes a point of where Peter and the other disciple find the wrappings in which Jesus' body was wrapped and bound are found. It seems very deliberate, planned.

Whatever Mary and Peter and the disciples saw Jesus wearing in His Easter appearances it apparently gave no indication of His excruciating passion; His Easter garb was not the shroud of the dead. Jesus left the bindings of death behind. Forever.

On this Easter morning, many of us will wear new Easter clothes as well. After a long winter, we are finally able to leave our winter clothes behind (unless of course you are going to the Sunrise Mass on the beach at 6am – brrrrrr!).

The custom of wearing new outfits at Easter emerged with the early Church. When the newly baptized emerged from the pool of baptismal waters at the Easter Vigil, they were dressed in new white robes as a sign of their “putting on Christ” and a proclamation that they were reborn into the life of the Risen Christ. Even the Christians who had been baptized in previous years dressed in new clothes at Easter to indicate that they, too, were reborn through the penance and prayer of Lent. And so, the new outfit you are wearing is nothing less than a profession of faith in the Resurrection of Christ.

This Easter, I thank you, the people and parishioners of Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish, for revealing His presence to me through you, both in joy and in sorrow. I have been encouraged by your generosity of time, talent and treasure to our parish and to our sisters and brothers in need.

Rather than clinging to the ‘safe wrappings,’ you have put your own needs aside in order to take up the new things of God. I have been consoled by your patient understanding and your willingness to forgive me and one another as we strive to be the community of faith our baptism demands. In this way you have reflected for me an Easter posture that calls us to newness: a newness of attitude, of perspective, of spirit. I am inspired and energized by your enthusiasm to embrace the new life of our parish and its immeasurable possibilities.

My prayer for you and all those you love this Easter is that you know the Risen Jesus who enables us all to put aside the shrouds of vengeance and fear and distrust that may imprison us and to walk in a newness of life. May His resurrection touch you this day and every day, Alleluia!

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce

March 24, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

This weekend we listen to St. Luke's account of Jesus' suffering and death. Who do we most relate to in our Lord's Passion? In what way are we like Peter, or Pilate, Mary Magdalene or the Good Thief ?

Some years ago, a missionary priest was saying Mass in a Peruvian prison. A friend had sent him a couple hundred rosaries to give the inmates. The priest knew that there were more than two hundred prisoners but he also knew that some of them were political prisoners. He presumed that because of their communist philosophy they would not want a rosary. After finishing the Mass, the priest asked those who desired a rosary to form a line. One by one he placed rosaries around their necks. The line of prisoners, however, seemed to grow rather than diminish. When he got to the last rosary, ten prisoners remained. The priest held up the last rosary and said, "I am so sorry. I do not know what to do."

One of the prisoners said, "Padre, you have to give that rosary to me." "Why?" the priest asked.

"Look, Father, I am a thief. I admit it. That is why I am here." Then he glanced toward those arrested for insurrection and said: "But I am not like these political guys. *I am a real, honest to goodness thief.*"

Well, even the "political guys" had to laugh at this comment. The priest placed the last rosary over this real thief's head. The man smiled, revealing his crooked teeth, then took the crucifix of the rosary in his hand, raised it to his lips and kissed it.

One of the two men crucified with Jesus, Dismas, was also a "*real, honest to goodness thief*". He was brave enough to confess who he was to Jesus.

Is it possible to be so convinced of our own righteousness that we lose everything? The first step toward honesty requires the courage to face who we are. A good companion for us this coming week is the honest thief who hung on the cross beside Jesus. Like Dismas, we implore, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." With those words on our lips, we will make it to Easter Sunday.

Imagine what it would be like to hear: "Today you will be with me in paradise." Saint Dismas, pray for us.

Monsignor Peter M Joyce

March 17, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

Joy is more than happiness, just as happiness is more than pleasure. Pleasure is in the body. Happiness is in the mind and feelings and Joy is deep in the heart, the spirit, the center of the self.

The way to pleasure is power and prudence and the way to happiness is moral goodness. But the way to joy is sanctity; loving God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself. While we all want pleasure, more deeply, we want happiness. Most deeply, everyone wants joy.

Does it seem surprising that the theme of joy comes up during Lent? Last week for example, we celebrated Laetare Sunday, a time to “rejoice”. The theme continues this Sunday in the Psalm: “The Lord has done great things for us. We are filled with joy.”

We tend to think of Lent as a solemn time: prescribed days of fasting and abstinence, examination of conscience, confession of sin, stations of the cross, meditation on the Passion of Christ. All of this is part of Lent, yet the goal is joy. In today's Gospel, we see a woman who sought joy in a desperate way. She wanted it so much that she was willing to jeopardize her marriage, her family, her good name and her life. When this woman hit bottom she was faced with a choice. She found herself sinking into bitterness and despair, but Someone made her choose to look up. She saw a man tracing some letters on the ground. Perhaps a message for her accusers, perhaps a message for her. For a short while, she was alone with this man, a very different man than she had ever met.

Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" With a shyness she had never experienced, she whispered, "No one, sir." Then the man spoke those beautiful words: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

We are only seven days from Palm Sunday. Let us enter Holy Week with Joy.

Lenten Parish Penance Service
Thursday, March 21, 2013, 7 pm
Resurrection Church

Five priest will pray with us for the
Joy of forgiveness.

“In the end only two remained: *miseria* and
Misericordia.” *Miseria*, the human misery of
sin. *Misericordia*, the Mercy of God.”
St. Augustine

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce

February 24, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

This past Sunday, I traveled with three people who seek to become Catholic this Easter to Saint Agnes Church in Blackwood. We joined hundreds of others from throughout our diocese for the same purpose. At this *Rite of Election*, Bishop Sullivan encouraged us all to not allow Lent to pass without effect in our lives. He encouraged us to embrace this great season of grace by investing ourselves more fully in the three pillars of our Lenten journey, namely, prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

As you may recall, two weeks ago in the View we considered how we might embrace the ‘ethos’ of fasting. Last week in the View, I proposed some opportunities to enhance our prayerful encounter with Our Lord and Savior (among these the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration every Wednesday 5:30-6:30pm).

Today, when we consider in Sacred Scripture the Lord’s transfiguration, I ask you to consider how you might participate in this very same reality; that is, sharing in the transfiguration of the Body of Christ in our sisters and brothers in need.

This Lent, I am ‘offering up’ some things that are part of the routine of my life and putting aside the money I would spend on these habits to give to someone in need. I ask you to consider the same.

On Ash Wednesday, Our Lord taught, “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matthew 6:3)”. So that my almsgiving might be done ‘in secret’ I am entrusting my gift to the coming Annual House of Charity Appeal. In this way, I trust that my gift will be given to one in need who is known to God alone.

You might protest that by my telling you all of this that in some way I am no longer anonymously living my Lenten fast. I agree this is possible, but I also take this risk in the hope that I would be joined by you in embracing this pillar of Lent. Please put aside the money that you would have spent on your Lenten sacrifice for the Annual House of Charity appeal.

I know of no better way to care for our sisters and brothers in our very midst who are in need.

Your gift to the House of Charity – Bishop’s Annual Appeal provides for health, social and welfare services in southern New Jersey for needy people regardless of race, creed or origin.

I have witnessed personally, for so many years, how the ‘House of Charity’ has fulfilled this mandate in Social and Community Services such as Catholic Charities (in Cape May County, Catholic Charities was a foremost and first responder to those who were affected by Hurricane Sandy). The House of Charity enables St. John of God School to have a presence in our parish at Saint Casimir Campus for children with special needs in our county. The House of Charity ensures that there will be chaplains to minister to our vulnerable sisters and brothers in all the local nursing homes and hospitals in our parish and county.

On a personal note, I thank all who support the House of Charity for ensuring that the elderly priests and sisters who have expended their lives in service to our parish(es) for so many years will end their lives with someone to care for them. The House of Charity ensures that there is not only ministry to those most vulnerable, but also that there is relevant ministry to our young men and women within ‘Youth and Campus Ministries’. Also, the House of Charity sustains the formation of future priests so that there will be someone to proclaim the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to our children.

We are in the midst of a ‘Season of Grace.’ Our Lord ensured us that all who are embracing prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this Lent will have their ‘reward’ from the Father who sees you in secret (cf. Matthew 6:4). I pray you know the fullness of God’s reward.

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce

February 17, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. (Mk 1:12)

With the announcement of the Holy Father's retirement and the installation of Bishop Dennis Sullivan as the new Bishop of the Diocese of Camden, I am reminded of the adage, '*The only constant is change*'. From within and without, change is relentless. In our frenetic and ultimately futile efforts to keep pace with change, we exhaust ourselves.

God is the only constant. There can be only one response, "*Be still and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46:10).

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Last week, we reflected upon our Lenten fasts and the possibility of their opening us to the intimate and profoundly altering grace of God. This week's Scripture invites us to discover in *stillness* a great power in our fractured world and lives. From its deep spring of wisdom *stillness* teaches us that when we face what seem intolerable burdens the best response is to be still and thus gradually overcome the pressures of others and the self.

After His Baptism, Jesus did not choose to go into the desert. It was the Spirit that drove him there. From His humanity He might have felt and believed – you have the endorsement of the Father, the attention of the crowd, now hit the campaign trail. Instead he spent forty days in desert stillness. He confronted in the solitude and stillness of the desert the temptations of the human heart. And then, facing and integrating these promptings of the human heart, they became angelic forces transmitting the essential goodness of our nature. For the impulses of the human heart cannot be overcome by force, but only by love.

Our essential goodness is the only sure base from which to do what Jesus did next – to 'proclaim the good news from God'. This is our work in life. To discover and to be faithful to this 'work' is the only choice that is real. Our desert is our meditation.

Each Wednesday of Lent from 5:30-6:30pm, Our Lord, Our God, Our Constant, will be present on the altar at the Church of the Resurrection. I invite and encourage each of you to leave the desert of our world with all its vagaries, deceits and empty promises for but a few minutes in the presence of the Eternal One. Leave before Him the exhausting impulses of your heart and discover the stillness wherein He and our angelic nature reside.

Monsignor Peter M Joyce

February 10, 2013 - A View from the Rectory Window

As this holy season of Lent is upon us, I share with you the following: An Irishman moves into a tiny hamlet in County Kerry, walks into the pub and promptly orders three beers. The bartender raises his eyebrows, but serves the man three beers, which he drinks quietly at a table, alone. An hour later, the man has finished the three beers and orders three more. This happens yet again.

The next evening the man again orders and drinks three beers at a time, several times. Soon the entire town is whispering about the Man Who Orders Three Beers. Finally, a week later, the bartender broaches the subject on behalf of the town. "I don't mean to pry, but folks around here are wondering why you always order three beers." "Tis odd, isn't it?" the man replies, "You see, I have two brothers, and one went to America, and the other to Australia. We promised each other that we would always order an extra two beers whenever we drank as a way of keeping up the family bond."

The bartender and soon the whole town was pleased with this answer, and soon the Man Who Orders Three Beers became a local celebrity and source of pride to the hamlet, even to the extent that out-of-towners would come to watch him drink. Then, one day, the man comes in and orders only two beers. The bartender pours them with a heavy heart. This continues for the rest of the evening he orders only two beers. The word flies around town. Prayers are offered for the soul of one of the brothers. The next day, the bartender says to the man, "Folks around here, me first of all, want to offer condolences to you for the death of your brother. You know the two beers and all"

The man ponders this for a moment, then replies, "You'll be happy to hear that my two brothers are alive and well. It's just that I, myself, have decided to give up drinking FOR LENT.

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"What are you giving up for Lent this year?" Or, are you "doing something" for Lent, such as going to weekday Mass, reading the Bible or praying the Rosary? Why? Did you "get something out of" doing it last year? Or, did Easter find you pretty much the same person, with a craving for chocolate?

Unfortunately, many of us were taught spirituality "in reverse." The importance of ascetical practices was impressed upon us, without a deep understanding of their beauty. We learned to live the "ethic" (the obligatory actions) before we embraced the "ethos" (moral nature/guiding beliefs).

In the reading for the second day of Lent (Dt 30:15-20), Moses teaches us the right order of the spiritual life. First we are called to love the Lord. Next we are called to "walk in His ways" (i.e. follow Him, learn about Him). Only then, we are called to "obey His commandments."

We see how these first two must precede the third in our Lord's personal relationship with the Apostles. In love, Jesus sought them out. He called to them. And, at first, He commanded only one thing of them: "follow me." None of the Apostles were called to heroic actions (including martyrdom) until after they had fallen in love with Him.

Taking on an ascetical or positive practice during Lent is a wonderful idea, but only if our "heart is in the right place." Giving up chocolate may decrease a waistline, but it will bring no spiritual benefit if not done out of love. Remember, in giving up chocolate, we are not giving a gift to God. Rather, we are emptying ourselves in order to make room for Him. If this is not our attitude, all we are doing is moping around with a stomach deprived of chocolate. Similarly, reading the Bible is not an exercise in increasing our reading speed, nor is going to Mass an exercise in sitting still for a half hour. These are to be actions of love wherein we go before our Lord and say to Him, "Fill me with You!"

No matter what we decide to do or not do this Lent, may we choose first to love Him and second to walk in His ways!

Monsignor Peter M Joyce

February 3, 2013 -A View from the Rectory Window

How often, in your humble generosity, you may not realize the impact of your goodness upon others. How often in the days of the past holiday season from Thanksgiving to Christmas someone approached me to thank me for the physical support, emotional encouragement, and spiritual consolation of the parishioners of our parish family. I know, as I hope you know that the thanks shared with me, belongs to you. The following is just one of so many expressions of gratitude:

Dear Fr. Pete,

I'm writing on behalf of Joseph Tordella, Rory Liberta and myself, the three boys whose Caritas project you helped us out with. Our project, "Supplementing Seniors", was not only a great success as a grade, but helped all of our lives for the better, and none of it could have been done without the help of your parishioners. Through what we collected through your parish, we were capable of assembling 30 "packages" to give to the senior citizens of Cape May County as we rode around with the Meals on Wheels program one November day. Cape May County has the highest rate of seniors in need in all of New Jersey, and even our small donations were able to make things easier for not only the seniors but also the institutions that help them out. Our project was not only a success in terms of helping the seniors and the Meals on Wheels program, but it also succeeded in fulfilling the goal of the Caritas program, to learn to care for others. St. Augustine Prep prides itself on its three-word motto: "Veritas (truth), Unitas (unity), Caritas (love)". The goal of the Caritas project has always been to get us students to find a way to make an impact on the world, however small, and spread love and caring. Nothing will ever compare to seeing the faces of the lonely seniors light up with joy when we walked in carrying food and other items. What seemed like such a trivial event, just walking in the door, absolutely made these people's day, and the impact it had on the three of us was and still is truly touching. While we'd like to apologize about how late in coming this "thank-you" was, we'd also like to offer our hand in any projects you need help doing around the parish. I'd like to thank both you and your parishioners for not only donating items to give to senior citizens to make their holidays a little better, but also for helping give my two friends and I the ability to change lives for the better and giving us the opportunity to feel the impact we have felt. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Nick Ventura

As I write this, I want to add my own expression of gratitude to that of Nick's and countless others who have shared their admiration for you. I have one of the most privileged positions to witness your daily goodness. I am grateful to be with you, I am challenged by your generosity and I am inspired by your faith. May you be aware of the fullness of God's blessings in your life and in the lives of those you love.

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce

January 6, 2013 View from the Rectory

Viktor Emil Frankl, MD, PhD was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist. Unlike Saint Maximilian Kolbe, he was also a Holocaust survivor. His experience as a concentration camp inmate led him to discover the importance of finding meaning in all forms of existence; he wrote, "Everything can be taken from a human but one thing: To choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."

Reading the accounts of Our Lord's birth invites us to consider that changing one's attitude involves risk. Mary and Joseph lost their dreams and their plans and perhaps their good reputations because of Christmas. Implicit in their obedience to God was the risk of losing their family, their homeland, their security. Christmas changed their lives.

The Magi gave up the comfort of home as they began a journey across the desert to visit a child they saw in the stars. Traveling in those days was anything but easy or pleasant. They were a lot poorer materially when they left Jesus . . . but they were spiritually richer. Christmas changed their lives.

The shepherds were changed by Christmas. Scripture says they were terrified by the news that they were to leave their flocks and go to Bethlehem. Their flocks were their bank accounts. Their money was completely tied up in their sheep.

Yet, after the angel told them about a Savior born in Bethlehem, they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord told us about." They put their wealth at risk in order to see Jesus. Christmas changed their lives.

I believe this change is an essential part of Christmas and what it means to be Christian. Can Christmas change us? Like Mary and Joseph, can we risk being ridiculed because we are doing what God asks us to do? Like the

Magi, are we willing to go through some uncomfortable situations in order to worship Christ? Like the Shepherds, are we ready to forfeit security to go where God is?

So often, as a New Year dawns, people consider resolutions to improve their lives, perhaps on this Feast of the Epiphany we might consider changes that our God asks of us.

Please be assured of my prayers for you and your family in the coming year. May you, and everyone you love, be aware of the fullness of God's Blessings and may Saint Maximilian Kolbe pray for us.

Monsignor Peter M. Joyce