

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Ps. 118; I Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

Happy Easter! Christ is risen, Christ is truly risen! When I was a student at Orchard Lake St. Mary's College, I learned how to say this in Polish: "Wesołego Alleluja! Chrystus zmartwychwstał, zaprawde zmartwychwstał!" When I was a student in Rome, I learned how to say it in Italian: "Buona Pasqua! Cristo e risorto! Veramente e risorto!" Unfortunately, I would forget the rolled letter r in the middle of the word and said, "Cristo e risotto," which means, "Christ is rice! He truly is rice!"

Do YOU tend to come to church only at Christmas and Easter? If you do, thank you. You are teaching us something very important, which we who attend more regularly forget and can take for granted.

You are teaching us that the two greatest things Jesus Christ did for us was to become one like us in all things but sin at Christmas, and to show us how we could become like Him. And then to love us so much that He takes even our sinful humanity with Him on the Cross; to save us and to rise from the dead as the very first human being to be resurrected. The Catholic Church teaches that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we honor today and for the next fifty days, is the crowning truth of our faith.

One of my favorite Easter stories in the Gospels is the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Two short and tragic days after Good Friday, these disciples were walking away from Jerusalem and from the first Christian community in defeat and dejection. They had lost hope. We too, have moments of despair and desolation.

In those moments, the Risen Lord Jesus accompanies us along the road, even when we are moving in the wrong direction! Only the Lord can "break open" the Word in order to help us understand the stories of our lives, especially suffering. Only the Lord can rekindle our energy and our resolve to devote ourselves to what is most important in life, serving Him alone.

The encounter on the road leads to the table, the breaking of the bread and the total gift of self. Recognition of the Risen Lord is always linked with the Eucharist.

At the heart of our Christian life is this meal of Word and Eucharist which we celebrate every Sunday. The Risen Lord presides over all our journeys, wishing to set our hearts on fire in generous service to all people in need, near and far. The gift we have received is the gift we share. Humbly, we set out on the various roads of our lives to respond to all the hungers of the human family.

The account of Jesus' presence with the two confused, troubled disciples on the road to Emmaus is a graced opportunity for us, in the midst of this moment when we wish we could be somewhere else and in some other time.

It is this encounter that only happens when we hear God's Word and share in the Most Holy Eucharist that we imitate and recreate the Easter event! We welcome you to this Easter Sunday Mass and invite you to come every week to make Jesus real and to celebrate together His Presence in our worship and in our lives!

Teresa Tomeo is a syndicated Catholic talk-show host, author of numerous books and an international speaker. Building a relationship with Jesus is critically important, Tomeo said, something to which everyone needs to strive. "We were made for relationship," Tomeo said. "First with God and then with each other. Who better to have a strong relationship with than the one who knows us so intimately because he created us?"

Something -- or, more accurately, Someone -- will be missing in our lives if we don't have that relationship with God first, she said. "We may have good marriages and numerous friends, but we are never completely fulfilled without Christ." Tomeo offers four potential first steps for those trying to build a stronger relationship with Jesus.

1. Surrender daily. Before I leave my man cave in the rectory every morning, I pray the Prayer of Abandonment of Blessed Charles de Foucauld:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you

with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord,

and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands,

without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.

And, as I leave my man cave, I can hear the Father say, "I'm going to hold you to this, Nick!"

2. Immerse yourself in Scripture. Learn about God from the Holy Word He has given us. People often tell me that they talk to God, but that God never talks back to them. But God does. God speaks to us through His Word in the Bible. Take time to read, to learn, and to pray God's Holy Words.

3. Study the Catholic faith. Learn what the Church says and what the Church does NOT say about life and faith. Get a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Lives of the Saints. Rule Number One: No matter who or what we think we are, we find our identity only in God, by virtue of our baptism. We are a son or daughter of God, and a brother or sister in Jesus Christ. The Church teaches the truth about who we are, and what we are. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said decades ago that our society and our culture have perverted that identity and claim it to be our "truth." That is NOT the "truth" about us. It is all lies. Don't believe them!

4. Spend time with Jesus by regular attendance at Sunday Mass, Confession, and visits with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Consider this a "date" with Jesus to give Him your time and attention. Give God "Five and Five." Give God five minutes every morning and five minutes every evening. When you

wake up in the morning, thank God for the light of another day. Go over your day with Him. Tell Him that you won't face your day alone, but with God walking with you and within you.

At night, before you go to bed, go over your day with God. Thank God for the many hidden blessings you have been given in the day. Think of those moments when you were less than you could have been, when you may have made bad choices, even sinned, and ask God's forgiveness.

Do YOU want to see Jesus? Come where He lives, join us, and have life abundantly!

I close with this meditation on Easter joy:

WE WERE MADE FOR EASTER JOY!

In spite of delay, denial, disappointment,
disaster, disease and demise.

WE WERE MADE FOR JOY!

May JOY be found, surround, abound,
and astound you all the days of your life!

WE WERE MADE FOR JOY!

AMEN, ALLELUIA!