

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; I Corinthians 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!"

As a young priest, my priest mentor told me that the two major feasts which are the hardest to preach about are Christmas and Easter. Because everyone knows why we are here for those two feasts. So, he said, his homilies tend to be more brief than usual. Many years later a pastor would say to me, "You have a captive audience on Christmas and Easter, so give them all you've got!" So guess which of the two options I am going with?

Many years ago in another parish assignment, a disgruntled parishioner came up to me and said, "You know why I don't come to church every Sunday? Because whenever I do come to church, all you have in the church are poinsettias and lilies, poinsettias and lilies!" Is that the usual frequency of YOUR presence at Mass? Do YOU tend to come only at Christmas and Easter? If you do, thank you. You are teaching the rest of 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.

Along with the essential sign of the empty tomb, the Resurrection of Jesus is witnessed to by the women who first encountered Christ and proclaimed him to

the apostles. Jesus then "appeared to Cephas (Peter) and then to the Twelve. Following that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brethren at one time" (*1 Corinthians* 15:5-6) and to others as well. The apostles could not have invented the story of the Resurrection since it seemed impossible to them. As a matter of fact, Jesus himself reprimanded them many times for their unbelief.

While being an historical event, verifiable and attested by signs and testimonies, the Resurrection, as it is the entrance of Christ's humanity into the glory of God, transcends and surpasses history as a mystery of faith. For this reason, the Risen Christ did not manifest Himself to the world but to His disciples, making them his witnesses to the people. The Resurrection of Christ was not a return to earthly life. His risen body is that which was crucified and bears the marks of His passion. However, it also participates in the divine life, with the characteristics of a glorified body. Because of this, the Risen Jesus was free to appear to his disciples how and where He wished and under various aspects. Have YOU met Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ a part of YOUR life?

Jesus Christ, through His life, death and Resurrection, reconciled the world to God and saved us from sin. Beyond this, is it still necessary to have a personal relationship with Him? Three Catholic speakers and writers explain why it is of crucial importance.

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 said she once had everything that is supposed to make us happy: success, material possessions, good friends and family. "But I was still empty inside until I made my way back to the Church and into a deeper relationship with

Jesus Christ.” Tomeo offers four potential first steps for those trying to build a stronger relationship with Jesus.

**1. Surrender daily:** Tomeo points out that in our me-first world, the concept of surrender has an extremely negative connotation; but we must offer our lives to God’s will, not our own, to be fully open to a relationship with Jesus. “It’s a process,” she said. “But it starts with putting God in the driver’s seat and asking him to take control.”

Before I leave my man cave in the rectory every morning, I kneel in my prayer corner and 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:** Tomeo suggests thinking of the word “Bible” as an acronym: Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth. As St. Jerome said, ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ, so reading the Bible daily is a great way to build a relationship with Him. When we love someone, we want to get to know them better, and reading the Bible is how we can come to know Jesus. I’ve been preaching and teaching for 36 years, and I’m still learning!

**3. Study the Catholic faith:** “When we are serious about getting healthy, earning an advanced degree, saving for and building a new home, raising children, etc., we research, we investigate, we talk to all sorts of folks in order to make educated decisions,” Tomeo said. And yet, the wealth of beauty and

knowledge in the Church often stays on the literal or figurative shelf. Opening ourselves up to the truth will open us up to Jesus, as He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am happy to share with you the Good News that each one of you will have access for at least one year to FORMED – an internet connection to Catholic videos, books, and other learning tools that are kid-friendly, teen-friendly and unchurched-friendly. More information in today’s bulletin. Try it, you’ll like it!

**4. Get to know the saints:** The Letter to the Hebrews refers to the great “cloud of witnesses” (12:1), which Catholics understand as the Communion of Saints. The stories of the saints “encourage us to persevere through suffering and to maintain joy no matter the circumstances,” Tomeo said. “The more we get to know them, the more we get to know Jesus.”

I’ve had the privilege of standing in the presence of two living saints: St. Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. But in all of my parish assignments, I have stood in the presence and been inspired by so many of you over the years of parish ministry. I consider some of you living saints – the Vatican just hasn’t caught up yet with the official saintly designation!

The Catherine of Siena Institute works to ensure that every Catholic has access to a distinctly lay formation that calls each of the baptized to intentional discipleship rooted in the Tradition and magisterial teaching of the Church.

Sherry Weddell is the executive director and co-founder of the Institute. In 2012 she released a book titled “Forming Intentional Disciples” (OSV, \$16.95), which has sold more than 100,000 copies and has helped in the formation and discernment of Catholics all over the world.

In “Forming Intentional Disciples,” she speaks of the importance of a personal relationship with God. One chapter opens with a quote from Origen of Alexandria’s homilies on Luke, which summarizes perfectly the importance of a relationship with Jesus: “For what profit is it to you, if Christ came once in the flesh, unless he also comes into your soul?”

Sherry Weddell provided a few basic, beginning steps in building a relationship with Jesus -- steps from which anyone can benefit, she said, although each individual’s journey is unique.

**1. Spend time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament:** This should be done regularly, kept on the calendar as a sort of standing appointment. “The resurrected, glorified Jesus is there in the tabernacle for you,” she said. “Go spend time with him.” We have adoration on Monday afternoons and the First Friday of the month from 12 Noon to 3:00 PM.

**2. Regular attendance at Mass:** Worshiping the Lord before the Eucharistic table, and our reception of His Body and Blood at Holy Communion, are of utmost importance in fostering a relationship with Christ.

A dear couple who were close friends when I was an associate pastor in Hamtramck had a beautiful tradition. They had been married about twenty years. Their three daughters were old enough to take care of themselves, so every Friday evening was “date night” for them. They would leave work, go out to dinner, then go to a movie or go bowling. Just to re-connect. Jesus invites you every Sunday for a “date.” He wants to re-connect with you.

**3. Regular confession:** Part of building a relationship is righting the relationship when things go awry. Regular confession is an important step in growing closer to Christ. Try going at least 3 or 4 times a year. Or more.

**4. Daily religious reading:** Do not underestimate the power of daily prayerful, meditative reading of Scripture (for example, *lectio divina*) or Church teaching (the Catechism, Pope Francis’ daily homilies, encyclicals from any of the recent popes). Our Sunday Visitor, Zenit, and FORMED are starting points. And don’t forget the Eternal Word Television Network and Catholic Television Network Detroit on your cable channels.

Jeff Cavins is a widely renowned speaker and writer. Raised a Catholic, he fell away from the Church during college. After 12 years as a Protestant pastor, he returned to the Church and founded the EWTN television program “Life on the Rock,” which he hosted for six years. He is well-known for his Bible study programs, particularly the “Great Adventure Bible Timeline.” He says, “Jesus is the fullest revelation of who God is. Jesus is the icon -- God in the flesh. So getting to know Him is your full entry into understanding the Trinity and understanding your relationship with the Father.”

There are those who might say, "I go to Church; isn't that enough? Why do I need to have a relationship with Jesus?" Jeff Cavins says "No, there is a whole life to be lived, and there is life outside of the centerpiece of the Mass. Conversation, encouragement, teaching, rebuke, correction -- all of this is part of relationships, and those relationships have to be cultivated and nurtured. And this is how Jesus Christ -- and we -- rise spiritually from the dead! Do YOU want to see Jesus? Come where He lives, join us, and have life abundantly! ALLELUIA! AMEN!