

Easter Message 2009

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Easter is the feast that tests whether or not you and I are actually Christians. Because, let's be honest: it takes a strong believer to live with the conviction that people rise from the dead. Perhaps in fiction it is easier to believe, or better yet, science fiction. But an itinerant Jewish preacher who lived more than 2000 years ago? Yes, the belief that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead does stretch the imagination. But, that is just the point here: faith was never meant to be rational, something to be figured out, analyzed, tamed. By way of contrast, faith is necessary when others tell us that it is futile to challenge injustice, naïve to believe that a better world is not only necessary but possible, disrespectful to hold authority, including those in our Church, accountable.

Now, sad to say, based on what we

say and do in our unguarded moments, one must wonder whether we really believe in Easter. For we have done a very good job domesticating our faith, in making religion respectable. In many parts of our world today Churches are filled with good people, hardworking people, people with values, people who deserve the admiration of the wider community. We probably place ourselves among them. Nothing wrong with that except for the fact that Jesus insisted that we be a light, and a leaven, and a lover of all. And to do so often doesn't sit well with respectability.

Just look at some of the lessons he taught us. One, his contention that sinners and prostitutes might have a better chance at entering God's Kingdom than we do. Do those of us who are considered respectable people really accept that teaching? Perhaps we console ourselves with the belief that Jesus was engaging in hyperbole. But the Lord wasn't much given to hyperbole. He pretty much meant what he said.

Two, the teaching about those who begin work at the eleventh hour getting the same reward as those who labored all day in the sun. Those of us who are respectable might find that a bit hard to swallow. But once again, the Lord reminds us that his ways are not ours.

Yes, the feast of Easter raises troubling questions about the gospel message and the way in which we live it. Though in many countries we have parades to

celebrate this feast, and festivals, and big family dinners, Easter was really meant to shake us to our roots, to force us to answer some hard questions about our priorities, about what is worth our energy, about the values for which we are willing to give our lives.

Marcellin Champagnat also had to face the mystery that is at the heart of the feast of Easter. But the Founder already had some experience with the unconventional. After all, he had spent the better part of two years on a scaffold building the Hermitage. Not exactly a place where you found many of the religious or priests of his day. He was also pretty good with an ax, a sledgehammer, bricks and mortar. We also know that Marcellin hated pretention. And he had faith in God, relied on Mary, was saturated with the virtue of simplicity. Just the ingredients anyone would need to face the challenge of Easter.

For the feast of Easter doesn't mince words, it refuses to reinterpret the message of the gospel so that it doesn't upset our worldview. Yes, the feast of Easter challenges our beliefs. It insists that we love our enemies, that we right the wrongs done to the poor, that we do not turn a blind eye to suffering, that we do not exploit those who are weaker. Yes, the feast of Easter can be a burden because it is unequivocal in its message: the coming of Jesus changed our world, it brought with it Good News never before heard. The feast of Easter demands that we respond accordingly.