

**In the Heartland**  
**With Bishop Pates**  
**Sharing and Expanding Faith**

The public ministry of Jesus reaches its culmination with the events of the three days of Holy Week. Therein is dramatically revealed the mystery of salvation “unless the seed die, it remains just a seed, but if it should die it produces fruit ten, twenty, a hundred fold.” John 12:24

The close companions of Jesus through these events are compelled to change from spectators or faithful followers. They become engaged, transformed and ultimately fully committed to becoming participants in the salvific mission of the Christ, the anointed one.

This engagement comes into full focus as Jesus shared the Passover meal with his Apostles which we have come to know as the Last Supper. During his farewell talk, he cast into light the unity between Father, Son and now these his Apostles, in mission. He prayed earnestly “that they may all be one, as you Father are in me and I in you.” *John 17:21* He prayed not only for those present but for you and me and for all who were to emerge as believers in his name.

At this meal, where his most intimate sentiments were conveyed, he instituted the Mass and the priesthood, through which his presence is extended in tangible form for all of history. The active role of service and sustaining his mission were entrusted to the Apostles and their successors. After demonstrating the priority of service by washing their feet he directed them: “As I have done for you, so you must do for one another.” *John 13:15*

But it was at the foot of the cross that the profound mystery of life was accomplished which realization was to continually seep into consciousness. It is in dying, it is in the very giving of oneself that rising contemporaneously transpires. Becoming one with Jesus on the cross and the giving of oneself transcend time. Entering into this dynamic becomes the pathway to the life-filled relationship with the Father. “Not my will, but thine be done.” *Luke 22:42*

Out of the darkness of apparent defeat comes the brilliant light of the resurrection. Mary Magdalen and the other women, John and Peter, experience a total change of perspective.

Debilitating discouragement is turned into incredible victory. Proclaimed throughout the ages is the phenomenal reality: “Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen indeed!”

The character of the community associated with Jesus changed following the Resurrection. From a group of defeated, demoralized individuals, they grew together as a bonded family animated by the Spirit of God. They could not contain themselves. Initiated into God’s very life, through incorporation into Christ’s paschal mystery, they lived out that reality by each one dying and rising with Jesus on a continual basis. Moreover, in this newly found life they could not help but share their euphoria and invite others to enter into the good news.

The passage that the first community of believers experienced was to move from the relationship with Jesus as being external to now internalizing it so that their lives became intertwined with that of the Lord. “It is no longer I who live, but Jesus who lives within me.” *Galatians 2:20*

Similarly, the key reality for all of us who are now called to become followers of the risen Jesus is to internalize that relationship so that in a very conscious manner God lives within me.

The Church during the Easter season highlights the perennial expansion of its community with those taking on the life of God and being incorporated into the “Body of Christ” through the Sacraments of Initiation.

Baptism: One cannot but be deeply touched when witnessing the Baptism of an adult who has intensely prepared for that unrepeatable initiation into God’s life by being immersed in the waters of baptism – formally dying and rising with the Lord Jesus.

Confirmation: It is a great joy and a source of constant encouragement for me to be the minister to the young teenagers of 15 or 16 who come to be anointed with the Sacred Chrism and who intentionally invite the Holy Spirit to be their companions through life. What their parents began, they now consciously “confirm” and complete the baptismal process. They accept their identity as children of God.

Eucharist: Sustaining and growing the relationship with the Risen Lord is the Eucharistic food for the journey. With this nourishment we are transformed to appropriate and live out divine attributes such as forgiveness, compassion, generosity, sacrifice, mercy and selfless love.

A profound realization experienced by the early Christian community was that now they as the Body of Christ were to transmit the good news to their contemporaries.

So, too, the role of privileged witness is extended to all believers throughout history. Our life companions can especially benefit from our sharing what we have deeply internalized and which is the over-riding control of our lives.

In the upcoming Easter season, I urge you to manifest your personal witness by being committed and being active in two ongoing opportunities.

Catholics Come Home – This is the media campaign conducted in our diocese inviting those who have wandered from their Catholic home to come back. Each of us through our personal and gentle witness, warm patience and understanding void of judgment, are the centerpiece of this effort.

Jubilee of Mercy – Pope Francis designated this Holy Year with a two-fold purpose. We are called once again to recognize and profoundly experience the Father's Mercy extended to each of us. In turn, we are appointed ambassadors, on behalf of God, in extending Mercy to others.

It is my prayer that our annual celebration of the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus, will touch all of us in the Church of Des Moines with a renewed commitment to witness mercy in the best way we can, and thus fulfill the role belonging to each as a member of the Body of Christ.

Happy Easter!