

EASTER SUNDAY – 2023

What a great joy and privilege to celebrate with all of you again the greatest news ever: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! I wish all of you a most blessed Easter season that begins today and continues throughout the entire 50-day Easter season. A special welcome to all our out-of-town guests; I'm very glad you are here to share in this Easter joy.

First of all, I feel a need to address briefly the unexpected news we received this past Tuesday morning regarding the retirement of Archbishop Jackels: I was just as surprised to learn about his as you were. It has been no secret that the archbishop has had some health issues in recent years (two heart attacks among others concerns); nevertheless, I had no idea that this was in the works. In general, bishops are required by canon law to submit their letter of retirement to the pope at age 75, but such requests may be made earlier for health or other serious reasons. Archbishop Jackels will turn 69 this Thursday; he told us at the Chrism Mass that he submitted his request to Pope Francis two months ago in February, and he granted that request shortly after. His retirement went into effect this past Tuesday.

That means we are currently without an archbishop. Bishop Richard Pates, a retired bishop himself, a Twin Cities native and former bishop of the Des Moines Diocese, has been named apostolic administrator for our archdiocese for now. He will simply keep things in a sort of 'maintenance mode' at this time until Pope Francis names a new archbishop for us. I don't know how long that will take; we certainly hope and pray that it will be sooner rather than later! In any event, please pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the pope and all involved in the process of naming the new chief shepherd for the Archdiocese of Dubuque. Pray also for Bishop Pates as he serves in his interim leadership role...and pray especially for Archbishop Jackels who gave us nearly ten years of generous and joyful leadership. I'll have an address in next Sunday's bulletin where you can send him a card or note if you would like.

Back to Easter Sunday: this is truly a glorious day because it reminds us of Jesus' triumph over death—the greatest news that we could ever hear. But we might well ask ourselves: do I live, do I conduct myself as if I really believe that Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of my life? Or does our Easter life and celebration consist of the family Easter gathering and returning to those things we 'gave up' for Lent...and little or nothing else? Now, don't get me wrong—there is nothing whatsoever wrong about such things. Family gatherings are blessed, joyful events and the meals are always delicious. And I will gladly confess to looking forward to indulging my own sweet tooth once again after going through that seemingly never-ending Lent of 40 long days.....oh, the suffering I endure!

But Pope Benedict XVI (God rest his soul) back in 2011 wrote very well about what Easter is really all about and why the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead really does change everything. In his words: "Easter brings the newness of a profound and total passage from a life subjected to the slavery of sin to a life of freedom, enlivened by love...and builds a new harmony in one's own heart and in the relationship with others." Sounds rather life-changing,

doesn't it? Does the reality of the risen Christ change us and how we live and conduct ourselves, or does it not?

Of course, we have to admit that Easter doesn't free us from all struggles or sorrows, stress or sadness. Illness still happens, death—expected or out-of-the-blue—still happens, broken relationships or crises of whatever other kind still happen. But Easter and the reality of Christ risen from the dead puts all those things, all those crosses we have to bear in this life, in a whole new perspective that reminds us that sin and struggles of whatever kind and even death itself no longer have the last word. They cannot conquer or destroy us. Peter and John and the other apostles, Mary Magdalen and the other women and followers of Jesus, were privileged to see and hear the risen Christ with their own eyes and ears. And that, along with the Holy Spirit they would receive at Pentecost, allowed them to live a whole new life by the power and reality of Easter. And for the 2000 years since then, countless followers of Christ—apostles, martyrs, holy men and women from all vocations and all walks of life found and lived lives of great joy and faith even in the midst of great struggle and persecution. They were able to endure all that came their way because they knew and lived the great truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

As we have been remembering these last few days, Jesus 'emptied himself...humbled himself' for our sake in the words of St. Paul to the Philippians. That self-emptying on the part of our Savior leads directly to a new fullness for us:

- the fullness of joy in Jesus' rising from the dead;
- the fullness of grace and strength we need to handle all the crosses that come our way in this life;
- and the fullness of hope for sharing in Jesus' risen glory in heaven, a hope and a promise that are absolutely trustworthy because of his own glorious resurrection—the rock-solid foundation of that hope.

Again, I wish you all a most blessed Easter Sunday and season...and a most blessed Easter life. May you live and radiate that joy for the rest of your days in this life...so as to share in our risen Savior's eternal joy and glory in his kingdom.