

There's a story that's very appropriate to this particular Easter weekend. It goes like this: An old Priest was dying lying comfortably in a hospital bed. He sent a message requesting his lawyer and the Town's Internal Revenue Service agent to come to the hospital. When they arrived, they were ushered up to his room. As they entered the room, the Priest held out his hand and motioned for them to sit where they could in the hospital chairs on either of the bed. The Priest shook their hands, sighed contentedly, smiled and stared at the ceiling. For a time, no one said anything.

Both the lawyer and the IRS agent were very touched and flattered that the old man would ask them to be with him during his final moments. They were also puzzled because the priest had never really given any indication that he particularly liked either one of them. Finally, the lawyer said: Father, why did you ask the two of us to come here today? So, the old Priest mustered all his strength he could, and then said weakly, Our Lord and Savior died between two thieves and that's the way I'd like to go too.

Happy April 15<sup>th</sup> Weekend. Because of Easter and Passover and the way April 15<sup>th</sup> falls this year, everyone gets an extension for filing taxes. But regardless of that, we're here to look for and to find an extension of hope in the midst of the vexing and taxing issues of life.

Let me tell you a story of how I was privileged to experience Easter in a new way during the summertime a year and a half ago. I went to visit a woman who lost her 20 year-old son in a motorcycle accident on Sunrise Highway as he was coming home from work for lunch. I had offered his funeral Mass a few weeks earlier. During the conversation, the grieving mom mentioned that the police had recovered from the accident scene her son's backpack, cell phone, helmet, wallet keys just about everything he had with him. The one thing that wasn't found though was the metal cross he always wore around his neck. It was the only thing that he never took off and, it was physically attached to him on a heavy chain. She asked, "What does that say; is there a message here, that his cross wasn't found?" I didn't really know exactly what to say except that he no longer needed the cross – because, as people of faith – he's with God. She and her husband were now carrying their son's cross in their horrific grief. And we talked about that for a while.

Later in the conversation, she went on to say that she'd been trying to get into his cell phone to retrieve the messages that family and friends told her they were leaving him just to be able to have some connection to him and to hear his voice again. But she didn't know her son's password. She had tried all sorts of numbers that he might have set (birthdays; special years; or code numbers) – but to no luck. Then, in a moment of grace she said – the cross – (the missing cross, Mark's cross) maybe, that's it.

So, she grabs the cell phone; presses the home button and then enters: 2 0 4 6 (the outline of the Cross on the keypad). And that was it. That was his Password. She connected with her son – through (or because of) – the missing Cross. **THAT WAS AN EASTER MOMENT I'LL NEVER FORGET**, for her and for me.

God is always connecting with us – through signs and symbols; messages and messengers to bring us the assurance of his presence – even in the coldest and darkest of times (and especially) through our crosses and pain. The cross; the struggle, the diagnosis; the illness; the loss – it's there (in those places; at those moments) that God comes to "pitch his tent among us;" to brings us "new life; and, to offer an extension of HOPE.

There are different versions of the Empty Tomb story that can be used for Easter. On this Easter morning I'd like to focus on (5) five words from St. John's account of the Empty Tomb of Jesus. St. John says: "while it was still dark" they came to the tomb. "While it was **STILL** dark" can partially summarize what's happening in our world (near and far) [SYRIA / N.KOREA / GANG VIOLENCE]. There's still a lot of darkness around the globe – even after some 2000 Easter Sundays. And maybe there's "still" some darkness in your life as well – a loved one died; a friend is sick; someone we know is struggling with an addiction; life doesn't seem to be going

anywhere; a relationship has gone sour. If you're not struggling with some cross at this time – thank God – that's great. Maybe you don't need a little Easter right now. It's just a beautiful holy day to celebrate (as well great weather)! But many people do need - not just an extension for taxes – but an extension of hope because it's "dark" out there – and people still come to some kind of tomb looking for God.

Two weeks ago, my mother received a diagnosis of stage 3 cancer. There's nothing to do medically, but everything to do to celebrate each day as an extension of life and love from God. Every day – is a EASTER gift to live to the fullest we can. Yet, when we look at all the darkness out there and inside for each of us, it's easy to feel sad, discouraged and defeated. But what does Easter tell us? It's the victory of good over evil; light over darkness; life over death. We hold fast to the truth that God has the last word. Jesus is the password that unlocks His presence among us even "while it is still dark" out there.

But Easter isn't just about Jesus' rising 2000 years ago nor is it simply about our future rising from the grave after we die. Easter is about our rising now leaving behind the old clothes the old leaven; the negative attitudes; the "rut" of sins and "putting on" the new life of Christ not only in the next world – but this world – right now.

There's a story about a man and a woman who were married for scores of years. It wasn't the best arrangement. Whenever there was a confrontation, yelling could be heard deep into the night. The old man would shout: "When I die, I will dig my way up and out of the grave and haunt you for the rest of your life." Neighbors feared him. And the old man kind of liked the fact that he was feared! Then, one evening at age 98 – he died. After the burial, the neighbors of the widow, concerned for her safety asked – "aren't you afraid that he may indeed be able to dig his way out of the grave and haunt you for the rest of your life? The wife said – "let him dig. I had him buried him upside down, and I know he'll never ask for directions."

When you think about it – you really don't have to be dead in order to be in a tomb. You and I could be alive (and kicking) – but trapped in the bindings of death. We rise even "while it is still dark," the moment we climb out of the tombs that we're in (anger, addiction, hate, depression, fear) or whatever disabling spiritual or emotional condition we've settled for. Why wait till death to do that? Now is the acceptable time to rise above whatever is holding us back.

Jesus is already gone from the tomb. The only question now is whether or not we're willing to abandon our own tombs or whatever is holding us back from the NEW LIFE that God wants to offer us.

They say you can't avoid death and taxes. Only occasionally do we get an extension on taxes. But our Easter faith gives us a perpetual extension of hope, the sure and certain hope that we will see those who have gone before us again, and our faith assures us, that in this world God is always offering us new opportunities of life and multiple extensions of hope, even while it's still dark through the gradual understanding and unveiling of the password of the Cross and Resurrection.

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