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Easter and the Empty Places

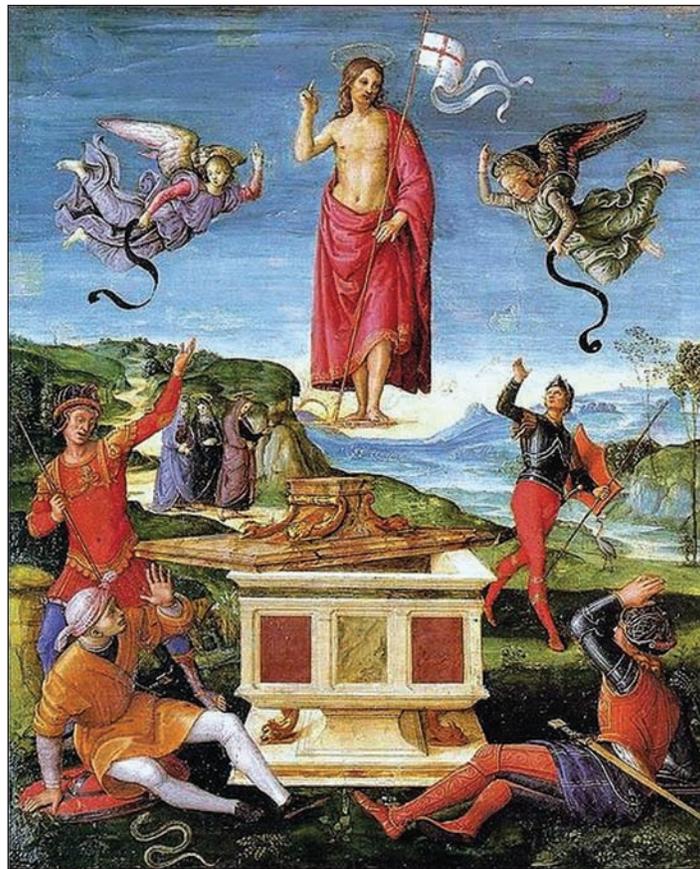
Death will be vanquished and the graves deserted

In the mist of a greening and revivifying earth we celebrate Easter – our great feast of hope. This year it is an Easter that comes after a fierce winter’s long siege, and we appreciate it all the more. We feel an upsurge of reassurance. The Biblical singer of the Song of Songs (2:11-13) may best express our feelings:

“For, lo, the winter is past, the snow is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth: the time of the singing birds has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land . . . Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come.”

My understanding of Easter has changed significantly over my lifetime. I see Easter differently now, and I hear the Easter stories in a new way.

Now, at Easter, memories are aroused



THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST
BY RAPHAEL (1499-1502)

in me and fill my heart with distant music and with loved ones who have died. “*They climbed the golden stairs,*” as I heard a Black minister say.

I think of the people I knew as a child – my parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts, teachers. As a child, I thought of them as boundless. It never crossed my mind that there ever would come a time when their places would be empty. I still carry on an interior dialogue with them, and probably will for the rest of my life.

And I have the aching sense of so many other empty places – people I loved who were taken from me; loving hearts that my soul held dear, people with whom I identified myself. For me, certain lights were withdrawn from

the world. I live in a kind of land of the

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dead, and it's lonely.

I also realize that I'm living now in death's immediate neighborhood. I know I'm temporary and not indispensable. I sense death stealing up softly from behind. Indeed, death, the artist, is slowly putting in his first touches.

Then there are those wonderful Spring dawns that make up the end of the Gospels. The women in the magical first light of day finding the rolled-back stone. Peter and the disciple Jesus loved, silhouetted against the first light smudging the sky over Jerusalem, running back to the tomb, and finding the burial cloths laying neatly on the stone slab. And later, in the chill of another fragile spring morning, a figure standing on the beach . . . "It is the Lord!" The charcoal fire and that first Easter breakfast on the beach with sunshine creeping over the Sea of Galilee as joy overtakes sorrow.

"Everyone who believes in me has everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

— John 6:40

Flesh and blood will rise to eternal life. Our Christian hope is that "we will see one another again." We will see again those whom we have lost here below. Our bodies are destined for resurrection, when the Father will change our humiliated and corrupted bodies to be conformed to Christ's glorious body. Vanished faces and voices will return. Death will be vanquished, the graves deserted.

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the last day, I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God . . . This is my hope laid up in my bosom."

— Job 19:25-27

— **Dr. Thomas Hicks**

Dr. Hicks, a member of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, is a Professor Emeritus of Theology and Psychology at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

The Liturgy of the Hours

"Rise, let us leave this place"

This ancient homily for Holy Saturday, author unknown, is fitting now as we conclude the Holy Season of Lent and focus our thoughts and prayers on the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and He has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. . . .



"THE DESCENT INTO HELL," 11TH CENTURY MOSAIC, ST. MARK'S BASILICA, VENICE.

"God has died in the flesh and Hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, He has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He who is both God and the son of Eve.

"The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won Him the victory. At the sight of Him Adam, the first man He had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: 'My Lord be with you all.' Christ answered him: 'And with your spirit.' He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: 'Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'

"I am your God, Who for your sake has become your Son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now, by My own authority, command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in Hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. . . ."

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