

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I thought it might be fun to review some Easter trivia as we begin our reflection this evening:

- 1. In 2017, more than \$823,000,000.00 was spent buying 146 million pounds of candy right before Easter. That's about ½ pound for every American. Dentists are elated.**
- 2. The most popular Easter candy is not the jelly bean, it's Reese's Peanut Butter egg.**
- 3. The first Easter Parade was held in New York City in 1890.**
- 4. 89% of people eat the ears first on a chocolate bunny.**
- 5. 77% of parents make Easter baskets for their children.**
- 6. 57% of families prepare special Easter meals.**
- 7. 52 % of American Catholics attend Easter Mass, while 68% attend a Christmas Mass, and only 26 % attend a typical weekend Mass (that number was 62% in 1958).**
- 8. Ash Wednesday schedules are googled more frequently than Easter or Christmas schedules. Everyone wants those ashes.**
- 9. More than 10 million Easter lily bulbs are planted each year and they take 3 years to mature before they can blossom.**
- 10. Developed by Kelly Walker for the benefit of Joanne Cardine, our Holy Week Services have been live-streamed to her home, via our own Youtube station, Our Lady of Consolation, Parkesburg, Pa, set up by Megan Przychodzien that is available to everyone. Thank you so much Kelly and Megan.**

While all of that is interesting, and for the most part not terribly important, it's not what Easter is all about. It is somewhat disheartening though to realize that more people will provide Easter baskets of candy for their children and prepare special Easter meals for their families than come to Church on Easter. And from a poor pastor's perspective, it's more than a little disheartening to realize that more than \$800,000,000.00 will be spent on Easter candy in this country, while the Church has to struggle to pay its bills.

But, even that all pales into insignificance when we think about what Easter is really all about—an empty tomb and a risen Savior.

Of course there are many people today who have difficulty believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are many for whom this is a nice story, but they just don't believe it's

true. And, honestly, we can understand why they might feel that way. After all, none of us has ever encountered anyone who died and has come back to life. I mean, the so-called “Zombie Apocalypse” is popular right now in movies, but we all know that’s fictional. Does it really matter that Christ is risen from the grave? Does it all really matter? Would you be surprised if I answer emphatically, YES IT DOES!

It matters if you consider the futility of our lives if it all ends at death. It matters if you have ever truly loved somebody and lost them to death. It matters if you value the gift of life. It matters if you want more or care more or love more than this world has to offer.

You see, God has instilled within each human soul a desire to live—here on earth for as long as we possibly can. We don’t have to apologize for loving our lives in this world and wanting them to continue. But we all know, even the youngest among us, that one day our lives here must end.

Listen to what children have to say about death and dying. Even they’ve thought about it. Jimmy, a 9 year old said, “When you die, they bury you in the ground and your soul goes up to heaven, but your body can’t go to heaven because it’s too crowded up there already. Eight year old Sara said, “Only the good people go to heaven. The other people go where its hot all the time...like to Florida.” (Mmmh!). Marshall claimed, “When you die, you don’t have to do homework in heaven, unless your teacher is there too.” (Is he suggesting some teachers might not make the cut?). Joanie fearfully said, “Maybe I’ll die someday, but I hope I don’t die on my birthday because it’s no fun to celebrate your birthday if you’re dead.” (She apparently doesn’t think they party in heaven).

However, Easter is important not only because of what it says about life beyond the grave. It is important because of what it says about life here and now. If Christ lives, then life has meaning. There is hope even in the most difficult circumstances. If Christ defeated death; if my life goes on forever; if the Gospel is true, I can live courageously, victoriously, filled with hope, believing in a better tomorrow. I can overcome all fear and become more than I am, greater than I am, and become all that God intends me to be. I need never consider the possibility of absolute futility or failure or hopelessness.

I just recently learned that it was a pregnant woman who was struggling through a really difficult time with her husband. He had been critically ill, bills were mounting up, and money was scarce. Sitting alone in the darkness one night, feeling the weight of the troubles they were facing, and gently rubbing her swollen belly, she started thinking about her unborn baby. And she cried, “Who in their right mind would bring a child into a world like this?”

At the height of her fear, her loneliness, and despair, a quiet voice rose up within her saying, “Don’t forget the empty tomb, don’t forget the empty tomb.” Hearing those words within the deepest part of her being, Gloria Gaither started writing, “How sweet to hold a

newborn baby and feel the pride and joy he gives; but greater still the calm assurance, this child can face uncertain days because He lives. Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone, because I know He holds the future. And life is worth the living just because He lives.”

Reaffirming our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is part of why we are here right now. We need to be reminded of the power of life over death, of hope over despair, of love over hate, and there is only one place on earth that can be found. That is believing in the empty tomb of the Man from Galilee. It really is the only thing that makes life worth the living.

Knowing that, believing that, you know, it makes me want to shout. Doesn't it make you want to shout? So, Church, it's time to shout. Get on your feet! Put your hands together! Stomp your feet! AND SHOUT! HALLELUIA! HALLELUIA! HALLELUIA! WE HAVE A RISEN SAVIOR! HALLELUIA! HALLELUIA! HIS NAME IS JESUS! JESUS! JESUS! HIS NAME IS JESUS! HALLELUIA! HALLELUIA! HALLELUIA!