

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I wonder how many of us have taken the time to reflect on the seemingly implausible principles upon which our faith is based. We, like most people throughout history, accept the belief in a divine reality that created us and the universe in which we live. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe that divine reality is a God who has made humans in his image and likeness, “male and female he created them”. We Christians alone believe that this divine Creator of all that lives and moves and has its being, came down to earth in the Person of a man named Jesus of Nazareth, and suffered and died to say to us that no one on this earth is beyond His love and concern. That, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, is only the first outrageous claim of our faith.

The second is the meaning of the cross on which Christ died. The early Church came to understand that those nail prints in the hands and feet of the Lord should have been our hands and feet. But God so loved us that He sent His own Son to bear the burden brought about by your sins and mine. Can you believe that God really loves you that much?

The next tenet of our faith that stretches credulity is that of the Resurrection. Even the disciples who walked with Jesus couldn't believe their own eyes. The man that they watched die; the one whom they knew was buried in a cave with a huge rock blocking the entrance; the one for whom they had given up hope, stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Even the Gospel attests to the fact “they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost”.

If they found it so hard to believe even though they witnessed it with their own eyes, it's easy to see why so many today, 2,000 years later, find it utterly incredible. The question arises do we really believe, because Christ rose from the dead, that our lives will also really go on beyond the tomb? It really does seem incredible, doesn't it?

Of course when you think about it, my grandparents would never have believed you could fly across the ocean or across the country in a vehicle that weighs thousands of pounds, five miles above the earth. They would never believe that a man would ever walk on the moon or a message could flash from Philadelphia to China in a second or an event in New York could be seen in their living room. These are all things that now we can easily believe because we've witnessed them over and over again. We take them for granted.

Perhaps once we have risen with Christ, we will wonder why we never appreciated how much His empty tomb led us into a life that eye has never seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man ever conceived was possible.

Imagine, if you will, twins conceived in the same womb. Weeks passed as the twins developed. As their awareness grew, they laughed for joy: “Isn't it great that we were conceived? Isn't it great to be alive?”

Together, the twins explored their world. When they found their mother's cord which gave them life, they sang for joy: "How great is our mother's love, that she shares her own life with us." As the weeks stretched into months, the twins noticed how much each was changing. "What does it mean?" asked the one.

"It means that our stay in this world is coming to an end," said the other. "But I don't want to go," said the one. "I want to stay here always." "We have no choice," said the other. "Maybe there is life after birth!" "How can there be if we are separated from our life cord?" responded the one. "How is life possible without it? Besides, we have seen evidence that others were here before us, and none of them have returned to tell us that there is life after birth. No, this is the end".

The one fell into a deep despair saying, "If conception ends in birth, what is the purpose of life in the womb? It's meaningless! Maybe there is no mother after all!" "There has to be," protested the other." "How else did we get here? How is it that we are alive?"

"Have you ever seen our mother?" said the one. "Maybe she only lives in our minds. Maybe we made her up, because the idea made us feel good!"

And so the last days in the womb were filled with deep fear and anxiety. Finally the moment of birth arrived. It was a stunning, cataclysmic event, When the twins had passed from their world, they opened their eyes and cried for joy. What they saw exceeded their fondest hopes, their deepest dreams, their most powerful experience of love from the mother who gave them birth.

This imaginative analogy gives us some sense of what awaits us when we pass into the life Christ established for us on that first Easter morning when he rose up and left behind an empty tomb.

Yet some may still have difficulty accepting that God loves us that much. Others of us may have difficulty accepting the reality that life goes on beyond the grave.

But what does it mean if there really is a God who loves us unconditionally, without reservation? What does it mean for our lives if life goes on beyond thegrave?

One theologian put it this way, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live?" I'll say that again. "If you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

That happened in the lives of those first disciples. Their lives were changed in a matter of days or a few weeks after their encounter with the Risen Christ. From frightened and uncertain people, marked by doubt and envy and argumentativeness, they became apostles

of great courage and self-giving. Read all about the changes that came over them in the Acts of the Apostles.

How about you? If you believe that God really does love us that much and you believe that life really does go on beyond the grave, how has it changed your life to know that Jesus is alive?

If your change hasn't come yet, maybe you have not yet opened your heart to accept and surrender to God's love and the good news of Easter—Jesus is alive!

But, God, knowing the foibles and the weaknesses of the human heart, offers us still another implausible means of drawing us to Himself. He pours His own essence into us to prompt our doubting, troubled, prideful, selfish hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus Easter Joy gradually explodes into Pentecostal Action that gives us the same courage, wisdom, perseverance, generosity, and self-sacrifice given to the Apostles, which we read about in the Acts of the Apostles.

Therefore, even as the Easter Alleluias ring, may our prayer become "Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me (2X) Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me. Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me."