



“Where there is always a place at the table”

Church of the Ascension Herald - April 2011

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Beloved Friends in Christ,

I am still on cloud 9 even though it is a few days after we celebrated the Resurrection of Our Lord at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday! It's often this way for me in Easter Week, but I suspect that this year's Holy Week and Easter celebrations have been made even more poignant by having the privilege to observe them with the Church of the Ascension for the first time as its Rector. For all of us, these are life-changing remembrances of our Lord's last days in Jerusalem and triumphant victory over the power of sin and death. He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

I found myself to be quite captured by St. Peter in my reflections this year. It is true that Simon Peter has long been my favorite disciple, one with whom I have been able to identify on a more personal level. Enthusiastic, diving in “feet first” although not always with the best of forethought, loyal, devoted -- these are some of the characteristics of Peter. Bruce Chilton in his book *Rabbi Jesus* notes humorously that Peter was nicknamed Cephias, the Rock, probably not only for his steadiness and solid nature, but for being a bit dim-witted,” rock-headed,” at times too! Yes, Peter is so human. And this gives us all a way to connect in to the story of Holy Week and Easter in a more personal way.

We encounter Peter many times throughout the Gospel narrative, but in Holy Week we encounter some very important characteristics that I would like to reflect upon here with you. At the Last Supper, Peter was offended that his Lord, his Teacher, would take what would normally be done by a slave, the washing of the guests' feet, upon himself, and insist on doing it for his beloved disciples. Peter finds it outrageous – as perhaps many of us would – and objects. But he is told that he must comply if he wants to have any part with Jesus. With characteristic over-enthusiasm, he then wants to be washed all over by his beloved Teacher. Jesus gently chides him and he allows for his feet to be washed. How many of us find it difficult to be served, especially by someone who is humble enough to do so when they are in a position “above” us? Jesus taught Peter that these class distinctions really do not exist, fundamentally, in God's human family.

We can take heart, and much instruction, from Peter and the story of Good Friday. In Spanish the word for “story” and “history” is one word – historia – so take my use of the word “story” in this article in that expanded connotation.

Enthusiastic, faithful, courageous Peter protests that he will never deny Jesus, but when it comes to pass that Jesus has been taken away by the Roman and Temple police, Peter does indeed deny Him – not once, but three times. He is terrified. It is life-threatening at that point to be a follower of Jesus. All of his fellow disciples have scattered and separated. I wonder that any one of us would have done any differently.

Yet, this happens so that the power of saving grace, of redemption, of ultimate forgiveness, of unconditional love, now can be communicated to Peter – and to all of us. Christ does not curse Peter from the cross, condemning him to a life of misery, or to death, for his betrayal. No, Christ prays that all be forgiven, and this forgiveness extends to Peter as it does to all of us.

And now we may take Peter as a true model of how we are to be Christians today, in observing what he did after discovering the empty tomb. How many of us, after betraying Jesus, would have fallen into debilitating depression; or such shame and guilt that we could not function; or even chosen suicide as Judas did? Yet, Peter chose none of these paths, nor must we.

Peter chose life, and he chose it abundantly. On Easter Sunday we hear Peter in the Acts of the Apostles boldly proclaiming the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and we will hear much more of this throughout the Easter season from Peter and others. Peter moved through his shame, his guilt, his self- and other-betrayal, to become the cornerstone of the movement, Jesus' Way, and dedicated the rest of his life to building up the church. Peter's life was changed forever, and, for believer and unbeliever alike, the world was changed forever as well.

Let us each take courage and inspiration from Peter in these weeks and months following the proclamation of the Resurrected One. Let us each seek forgiveness – from God and one another. Let us each pursue honest relationships of integrity, sharing those places where we might have hurt one another, thus inviting in the reconciling healing and love of God into our midst in new ways. Let us each pursue honest relationships of integrity, sharing those high places of joy and love, communicating to each other just what each one has meant to us in our many years together. Let us each, like Peter, be Founders of the Church today. That work is never done, and as the post-Communion prayer includes, it is the work that we each have been given to do.

Easter blessings upon each one of you, this day and always.

In Christ's Love,

Fr. Richard

St. Martha's Guild

St. Martha's Annual Strawberry Festival will return on Saturday June 4, 2011 from 1-4 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$3 for children aged 6-12. See Rosemary Colca or any member of St. Martha's Guild for tickets.

Tickets will also be sold at the door. Children aged five and under are admitted free. Join us for a fun afternoon filled with fresh strawberries, cake, whipped cream, ice cream, and raffles. Baskets with patriotic themes for the Fourth of July and strawberry themes are needed for the raffles. We also need people to bake cakes. Please consider donating a cake, or an item for a theme basket. The theme this year is the 4th of July, so anything red, white and/or blue will be appreciated. Most of all, we are looking forward to your attending this fun-filled afternoon.

Rosemary Loffredo
President -- St. Martha's Guild

Ascension Day

Traditionally, the Church of the Ascension has invited the other Episcopal parishes on Staten Island as well as any other friends to celebrate Ascension Day with us. This year Ascension Day is on June 2. We will celebrate Holy Eucharist at 7:00PM followed by a festive reception hosted by St. Martha's Guild. We hope to see everyone there!

Giant Yard Sale!

The Annual Yard Sale will be held on Saturday, May 14th from 10:00AM until 2:00PM. It will be held in the rectory driveway and yard on the Benedict Avenue side of the rectory. Art and Joan Ullstrom are the chair people. As I know you are all doing your spring cleaning and getting rid of stuff you don't need, please consider giving your USEABLE items to the yard sale. You can bring them to the church and place them under the coat rack at the rear of the church or call Art and Joan at 718-447-6318 for other arrangements.

Your help is also needed to sort and price the items for sale. Joan and Art need help on Friday, 5/13 after the morning Mass and sales help will be needed on Sat. from 9:00AM until all the items are sold. (OK, I am an optimist!) Please use the signup sheet in the undercroft or call Art and Joan to volunteer to help.

Easter at Church

You can tell which people only go to church on Easter:

- * They read the program a lot.
- * They really study the stained glass windows.
- * If someone speaks to them, they may jump a little.
- * They may not find the proper hymn until the 2nd verse.
- * They put bills in the offering plate.

But when it's over they always seem to be happy they came -- and I have a feeling that God is, too.

Alleluia!! The Lord is Risen!!

These words rang out once again at Church of the Ascension at the late Easter Vigil last Saturday night, as we proclaimed the empty tomb, the Risen One, the One victorious over the sting of the Cross. What a celebration this time is!

Many expressed how meaningful Holy Week was for them, and I must share that it was profoundly moving to me as well. Palm Sunday ushered in the week with deeply meaningful readings of the Passion Gospel at both of our Masses. The entire congregation processed into the church from the yard with palms in hand, with the children of the parish grouped together and placing the palms in front of the Altar, just as those devoted followers of Jesus placed them on the road in front of Him as he entered Jerusalem so long ago.

From Holy Monday through Holy Thursday we began our day with the Mass or Morning Prayer, and on Maundy Thursday we enjoyed a simple dinner of lamb stew, lentil soup, olives, rustic bread and goat cheese prior to our worship. We participated in the foot washing in remembrance of Our Lord's humble gesture at that Last Supper, and sat in reverent silence as the Altar was laid bare and other items were removed from the Sanctuary after solemnly placing the Body and Blood of Our Lord at the Altar of Repose. We sat from 9:00 until midnight, watching and waiting with Him. On Good Friday we relived the Passion narrative with a dramatic multi-character reading, and contemplated and venerated the cross of the crucifixion of Our Lord.

Holy Saturday began with the liturgy for that day, then we began to prepare the church for the Easter Vigil, which began at 10:30 pm. What a great celebration that was, as we heard the stories of God's saving acts throughout history, and sang hymns after each of the readings. Then the Easter acclamation "Alleluia! The Lord is Risen!" was proclaimed, "The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!" was the response, the lights flashed on, the Gloria sounded and we rang bells in joyous accompaniment. The Mass ended appropriately just after midnight, and the vibrant energy of the Risen Lord was palpable into the next day for our two Easter Masses. Once again we had a large group of children process with colorful streamers during the opening hymn, adding greatly to the day's festive nature, and quite an Easter egg hunt after the latter Mass!

Most wonderfully, we welcomed two children into the parish family, Emma Grace Hinton, granddaughter of parishioners Peter and Carolee Caragliano, and Samantha Rose Gnyp, who has been attending for several weeks with her family. A most joyous occasion indeed!

I hope with this sharing of the Holy Week experience at Ascension to help those who are so far away to feel a part of what makes the Ascension experience so profound in worship and community. Already I am looking forward to another magnificent Holy Week next year!

Fr. Richard

Father Richard's Institution

If you missed Fr. Richard's institution on March 27 you missed a really gala evening. The service of institution was magnificent! About 140 people attended which makes for grand singing. The Rev. Canon Jay Gordon delivered an excellent and interesting sermon, laced with humor. The Rt. Rev. Andrew St. John, an assisting bishop for the Diocese of New York, officiated and celebrated. We were thrilled to have 5 of Fr. Richard's siblings in attendance.

After the service there was an outstanding reception with our usual over-laden table of goodies, which has become the trademark of St. Martha's Guild's refreshments. I think everyone was spiritually and gastronomically well-satisfied.

Did you know....

Did you know that the Church of the Ascension has an ongoing ministry at Lakeside Manor Home for Adults at 797 Brighton Ave. just off Forest Ave? The third Sunday of each month parishioners from Ascension along with

Fr. Richard meet at Lakeside at 2:30PM. Holy Eucharist is celebrated and afterwards refreshments are served and folks visit with the residents.

In addition, Ascension has holiday dinners at the church twice a year, at Christmas and Easter, for the residents of Lakeside. The next dinner is to be held on Sat., April 30. Holy Eucharist will be celebrated at 1:00PM and dinner served from 2:00PM until 4:00PM. Joan and Art Ullstrom are the chair people for this activity. For more info call them at 718-447-6318

Ten Things You Never Hear in Church

1. "Hey! It's my turn to sit in the front pew!"
2. "I was so enthralled, I never even noticed your sermon went 25 minutes overtime."
3. "Personally I find witnessing much more enjoyable than golf."
4. "I've decided to give our church the \$500 a month I've been sending to TV Evangelists."
5. "I'll volunteer to be the permanent teacher for the Junior High Sunday School class."
6. "Forget the denominational minimum salary. Let's pay our pastor so he can live like we do!"
7. "I love it when we sing hymns I've never heard before."
8. "Since we're all here, let's start the service early!"
9. "Pastor, we'd like to send you to this Bible seminar in the Bahamas."
10. "Nothing inspires me and strengthens my commitment to the Lord like our annual stewardship campaign."

Save the date!!

Vacation Bible School will be held from July 11-15 at the Church of the Ascension. Children ages 4-13 are invited to attend. The theme this year is "Shake it Up Café, Where Kids Carry out God's Recipe." Each day promises Bible lessons, music, arts and crafts, recreation and refreshments. For more information or to register your child call the church office, 718-442-4187, or see our web site, www.ascensionsi.org.

The Rector's Forum :

Beginning May 8th, at 9:00AM each Sunday, Fr. Richard will lead a Rector's Forum for four weeks on the Holy Eucharist and the Prayer Book. We will study the various forms of the Holy Eucharist contained within the prayer book, especially as pertaining to Holy Communion, and we will work together to learn how to construct different styles of the Mass according to the rubrics of the prayer book.

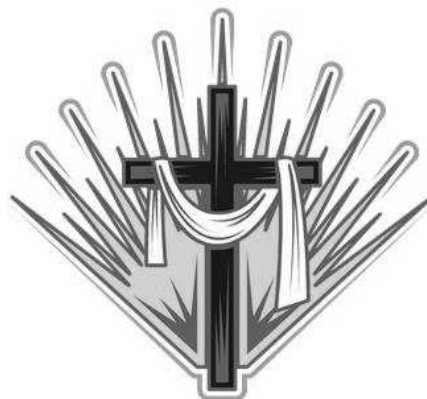
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Alleluia !!

The Lord is Risen !!



He is Risen Indeed !!

Alleluia !!