



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Resonating through the readings today are the themes of witness and forgiveness. Like many, the disciples in the gospel extract find it difficult to come to terms with the reality of Jesus' resurrection. After being told of it by others, and even encountering the presence of the Lord among them, they respond with fear and confusion. So too in the First Reading those addressed by Peter find it difficult to accept the Jesus they have seen crucified, as the Holy One, the Just One. We are challenged to deepen our own faith in the resurrection, in the living presence of the risen Lord among us today and to respond with our whole heart.

The suffering and resurrection of the Christ as part of the Father's promised plan of salvation is explained both by Peter and by the risen Lord. The minds of the disciples are opened to understand the truths of scripture. The readings invite us to reflect on the history of salvation and the unfolding of God's plan as revealed in the Scripture, that we too might deepen our understanding.

Forgiveness is one of the blessings of the resurrection. Not only individual forgiveness for our personal failings but universal forgiveness. In rising from the dead Jesus has redeemed the sin of the whole world. And this forgiveness, alongside the wonder of the resurrection, is what our faith calls us to witness to. A witness that is not only for our own community, those around us, but also for the whole world.

How strong, how alive, is the witness that we give in our daily actions? Do we openly accept the forgiveness offered us by the Lord? Does that knowledge that the Lord has already forgiven them? And do we live out that forgiveness in our lives as we forgive others?

How are we to take up the challenge of witnessing to the resurrection in the modern world? The Johannine letter spells it out for us. Our knowledge of God is linked to our actions. If we love God we keep His commandments in our lives—so we are challenged to review the quality—of our lifestyle. To reflect on how well it embodies the values of the kingdom of God in our day-to-day living. That is what reveals our true knowledge of God. And that is what gives witness to the world of our belief in the resurrection. Our lives are the witness we offer. We are called to repentance, to forgiveness and to give witness.

STEWARDSHIP: The disciples in today's Gospel came to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. When we share what we have with those who are in need, we, too, will discover Jesus in our midst.

READINGS FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

25 APR '21

Acts 4:8-12: Peter's courage and eloquence in confronting the leaders of the people are not due to any natural resources or talent of his own, but are due to the Holy Spirit working in him.

1 Jn. 3:1-2: We are reminded that we are the children of God, destined to be like God. Our extraordinary dignity is a gift from our loving Father.

Jn. 10:11-18: Jesus tells of the cost of being the model shepherd, who will unite sheep from different flocks.



EASTER FIRE

One of the most beautiful things about the Catholic Church is the use of symbols to communicate meaning. Fire, one of the most frequently used symbols in our faith, communicates a number of different meanings: Holy Spirit, purification, or bring light into darkness. At the end of the Lenten Season and the culmination of Triduum this symbol of fire was used in a moving ritual called "The Service of Light" which was held on Holy Saturday night at the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

While we as a Church make use of many symbols and symbolic actions, their origins are rooted in the distant past and in a culture with which we in the 21st century are not fully aware of or completely understand. So a legitimate question is what and why are we doing this. Why do we Catholics light an Easter fire?

The following discussion of the Easter fire and the subsequently the Paschal Candle is admittedly a bit long and will be spread over the next couple of weeks. But it would seem in order for us to have a complete understanding of these symbols we need to recognize their origins and developmental histories. Yes, their origins are at times found in pagan and ancient Israelite practices. When they were incorporated into the practices of the Church they were either "baptized" give Christian meaning or were seen in the practices of the ancient Hebrew people as prefiguring Christ and His actions and were given their full meaning as part of the Church's rituals.

So, we begin with the element of fire. Fire is one of the most expressive and most ancient of liturgical symbols. All the creeds of antiquity accorded a prominent place to this element whose mysterious nature and irresistible power frequently caused it to be adored as a god. The sun, as the principle of heat and light for the earth, was regarded as an igneous mass and had its share in this worship. Christianity adapted this usual belief, but denied the divine title to heat and light, and made them the symbols of the divinity, which enlightens and warms humanity.

In the West we see the Irish, as early as the sixth century, lighting large fires at nightfall on the Eve of Easter. The correspondence of St. Boniface with Pope Zachary furnishes a curious detail on this subject. These fires were kindled, not with brands from other fires, but with lenses; they were therefore new fires. There is no trace of this custom in Gaul, where the Merovingian liturgical books are silent on the point. It is difficult to say what took place in Spain, for although the Mozarabic Missal contains a blessing of fire at the beginning of the vigil of Easter, it can hardly be admitted that this ceremony was primitive. It may have been inserted in this missal at a later date as it was in the Roman Missal, in the case of which fire is obtained from a flint and steel. It is possible that the custom, of Breton or Celtic origin, was imposed upon the Anglo-Saxons, and the missionaries of that nation brought it to the continent in the eighth century. An altogether different rite, though of similar meaning, was followed at Rome. On Holy Thursday, at the consecration of the holy chrism, there was collected in all the lamps of the Lateran basilica a quantity of oil sufficient to fill three large vases deposited in the corner of the church. Wicks burned in this oil until the night of Holy Saturday, when there were lighted from these lamps the candles and other luminaries by which, during the Eve of Easter, light was thrown on the ceremonies of the administration of baptism. The rite must have been attended with a certain solemnity since the letter of Pope Zachary to St. Boniface prescribes that a priest, perhaps even a bishop, should officiate on this occasion. Unhappily we are reduced to this somewhat vague information, for neither the Roman "Ordines", nor the Sacramentaries tell us anything concerning this ceremony. This blessing of the paschal candle and the fire at the beginning of Easter Eve is foreign to Rome. The large lamps prepared on Holy Thursday provided fire on the Friday and Saturday without necessitating the solemn production of a new fire. The feast of the Purification or Candlemas (2 February) has a celebrated rite with ancient prayers concerning the emission of liturgical fire and light. One of them invokes Christ as "the true light which enlightenest every man that cometh into this world". The canticle of Simeon, "Nunc Demittis", is chanted with the anthem "A light (which my eyes have seen) for the revelation of the Gentiles and for the glory of thy people Israel."

The symbolism led quite naturally to the liturgical rite by which the Church on the Eve of Easter, Holy Saturday Night celebrates the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the un-lit wood and then kindled fire furnishes the expressive image.

The Service of Light happens directly before the beginning of the Easter Vigil, and it starts outside at a designated area to start a fire. As people come into church they are given an unlit candle, and the church itself is completely dark, which gives the impression we gather in darkness still following the death of Jesus on Good Friday. Then before the Mass begins people are invited to come outside to see the lighting of the Easter fire.

The beginning of the office also reflects ancient beliefs. The new fire is struck: thankfully not with a flint as in the past, we would still be out at the fire-pit if I had to do that, and blessed with the following prayer:

O God, who through Your Son bestowed upon the faithful the fire of Your glory, sanctify + this new fire, we pray, and grant that, by these paschal celebrations, we may be so inflamed with heavenly desires, that with minds made pure we may attain festivities of unending splendor. Through Christ our Lord.



Then the Paschal Candle is blessed, marked with the sign of the cross and year with the following ceremony.

A vertical line is inscribed on the candle with the words:

“Christ yesterday and today”

A horizontal line is inscribed on the candle with the words:

“the Beginning and the End”

The Greek letter Alpha inscribed above the vertical line:

“the Alpha”

The Greek letter Omega inscribed below the vertical line:

“the Omega

With each numeral of the current year:

“All time belongs to Him” (2)
“and all the ages” (0)
“To Him be glory” (2)
“through every age and for ever. Amen (1)

Five grains of incense are pressed into the candle in the form of a cross with the following words for each grain:

“By His holy”
And glorious wounds,”
“may Christ the Lord”
“guard us”
“and protect us. Amen”

And then the Paschal Candle is finally lit with the words:

“May the light of Christ rising in glory
Dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.”

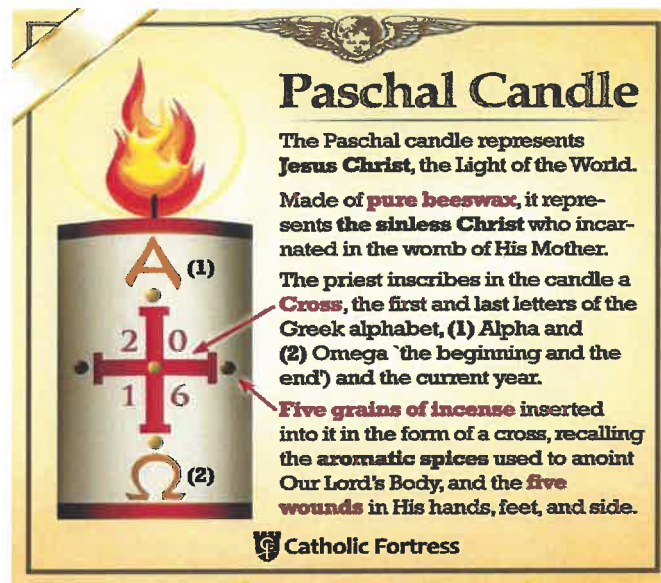
The Paschal Candle, which is the giant candle that stands near the baptismal font, symbolizes “light of Christ, rising in glory,” scattering the “darkness of our hearts and minds.” “Above all, the Paschal Candle should be a genuine candle, the pre-eminent symbol of the light of Christ.” (U.S. Conference of Bishops usccb.org) Every year a new Paschal Candle is purchased for the Easter Vigil.

After the Paschal Candle is lit then the procession into church begins. The deacon holding the Paschal Candle enters in first followed by the servers with incense, lectors, the priest, and the people outside the church. The following of the light of the Paschal Candle is symbolic of the Israelites who followed the pillar of fire at night as they were leaving Egypt. (Exodus 13:17-22).

As they enter the only light you can see is the Paschal Candle. Next, they stop at the gathering area in back of church where the priest lights his candle and those surrounding him light their candles. The deacon chants “Light of Christ” and the congregation responds “Thanks be to God”. This is repeated twice more as the procession moves down the aisle.

At the altar the deacon places the Paschal Candle in its stand, the entire church is lit by the small candles held by the congregation and the deacon chants the “Exultet”. This is a liturgical poem whose style is a lively and charming as the melody which accompanies it.

This ritual inevitably shows how Jesus is the Light of Christ. His resurrection brings light to a world of darkness. That light shines in each individual showing us we have the responsibility to keep that light burning brightly for others to see.



EASTER CANDLE PASCHAL CANDLE

The candle used during the Easter season has profound symbolism.

Not surprisingly, early Christians used candles in their liturgies. Initially this was done for practical purposes (especially when praying in the catacombs), but the light coming from the candles quickly became symbolic.

The candle-lit ceremonies reminded Christians of Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). For this reason candles became a central part of Christian worship and were associated with the light of Christ.

Besides using multiples candles for practical illumination purposes, there began a tradition where a single candle was used as a direct symbol of Jesus. According to Fr. Edward McNamara, "The most likely origin [of the Easter candle] is that it derived from the *Lucernarium*, the evening office with which early Christians began the vigil for every Sunday and especially that of Easter. In turn, this rite is probably inspired by the Jewish custom of lighting a lamp at the conclusion of the Sabbath. The rite therefore has its roots in the very beginning of Christianity. In the *Lucernarium* rite the light destined to dispel the darkness of night was offered to Christ as the splendor of the Father and indefectible light. This Sunday rite was logically carried out with greater solemnity during the Easter Vigil."

Over time the Easter candle was given greater prominence and was decorated to further expound on the Paschal mystery. Below is a brief guide to the Easter candle along with the corresponding symbolism.

Wax Candle

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "The pure wax extracted by bees from flowers symbolizes the pure flesh of Christ received from His Virgin Mother, the wick signifies the soul of Christ, and the flame represents His divinity."

Light

The Roman Missal summarizes this symbolism perfectly, “May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.” This connects the Easter candle to Jesus, “light of the world,” as he describes himself in the Gospel of John.

From the Easter candle are lit all the other candles in the church, showing how Jesus is the source of our light.

Flame

The flame is reminiscent of the “pillar of fire” that led the people of Israel and protected them as they escaped the slavery of the Egyptians. The Exsultet refers to this symbolism when it states, “This is the night that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin.”

Cross

The cross is the supreme symbol of Jesus and the instrument through which he saved the world from sin and death.

Alpha and Omega

It is common in Christian art to find two Greek letters: the alpha (Α) and omega (Ω). These two letters have an ancient history in Christianity and are rooted in the book of Revelation, where Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Revelation 21:6-7).

Year

As the priest traces the year on the Easter candle, he prays, “All time belongs to him, and all the ages.” This reminds us that God is here with us today and is constantly guiding all creation to himself.

Grains of incense

Five grains of incense are inserted into the candle on top of the cross, symbolizing the five “holy and glorious wounds” of Jesus Christ.

Consecrating Ourselves to St. Joseph – Why and How



On December 8, 2020, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis dedicated this year as the year of St. Joseph. In the past months a variety of prayers to St. Joseph have been provided in the Meanderings along with an explanation of this year of dedication. With the feast day of St. Joseph approaching, May 1, it may be an appropriate time to consider and plan for a consecration of ourselves to St. Joseph. The following is provided for reflection.

When the topic arises, some people may ask *why* we should consider consecrating ourselves to St. Joseph. Father Donald Calloway's new book, *Consecration to St. Joseph*, answers this question eloquently. Perhaps you don't yet have access to the book, or maybe you question whether you want to spring for it. If so, the following thoughts may be helpful.

What Does Consecrating Ourselves Mean?

The Encyclopedia at Catholic Answers tells us that, Consecration, in general, is an act by which a thing is separated from a common and profane to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies.

It goes on to further explain how Moses consecrated the entire Hebrew people as the People of God, as recorded in Exodus 24. Consecration in this sense definitely is not something new.

Consecrating Ourselves to St. Joseph

In his new book, Father Calloway explains that in consecrating oneself to St. Joseph, *...you acknowledge that he is your spiritual father, and you want to be like him. To show it, you entrust yourself entirely to his paternal care so that he can lovingly help you acquire his virtues and become holy. Total consecration to St. Joseph means you make a formal act of filial entrustment to your spiritual father so that he can take care of your spiritual well-being and lead you to God.*

But Some of Us Have Consecrated Ourselves to Our Blessed Mother!

Some of us may have consecrated ourselves to Our Blessed Mother, Mary. So, a question may arise as to whether we can or should further consecrate ourselves to St. Joseph as well. Consecration to Mary (and to Jesus through Mary) is a practice made popular by St. Louis de Montfort in *True Devotion to Mary*. Under this consecration, we give our life to Our Lady. In doing so, we can better avail ourselves of her motherly love as our spiritual mother, and achieve an even closer union with Jesus.

In answer to the question whether it's okay to consecrate ourselves to both Our Lady and St. Joseph, Father Calloway tells us,

God desires that all children be committed to the love and care of a mother and a father. You are not a member of a single-parent spiritual family. Mary is your spiritual mother, and St. Joseph is your spiritual father...Total consecration to Mary is not diminished by total consecration to St. Joseph. Mary wants you to consecrate yourself to St. Joseph!...Be at peace. The Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph are one.

Okay, but what if we do consecrate ourselves to St. Joseph, but haven't yet consecrated ourselves to Mary? No need to be troubled in this case, either. You will benefit from consecration to St. Joseph in any event.

Benefits of Consecrating Ourselves to St. Joseph

But how will consecration to St. Joseph be of benefit? Well, let's consider this crazy, "mixed up, muddled up, shook up world," to borrow a line from an old Kinks tune. The family, as never

before, is under demonic attack. It is the basic building block of the Church and of society. The enemy knows this and is doing all he can to destroy families, the Church and society. It's become a cliché, but what's right is viewed as wrong, and what's wrong is considered right in today's world.

Even some ordained clergy are suggesting that the Church adapt to the world's view of right and wrong in these issues, in spite of what Scripture and two millennia of Church teaching tell us. We are engaged in a spiritual battle—one from which we cannot run and hide. The stakes are too high. Now, consider some of St. Joseph's titles, including "Terror of Demons," and "Pillar of Families," "Most Strong," "Protector of Holy Church," among others. Why, oh why, wouldn't we want to consecrate ourselves to him? Why would we not want to ask him to take us under wing as our spiritual father, our guardian, and our protector? After all, who protected our Savior as a child when Herod wanted to kill Him? Who cared for and protected the Holy Family until his death in the arms of Jesus and Mary?

But What If We're Busy—Doesn't This Take a Lot of Time?

A simple act of consecration—a simple prayer—actually is all it takes to consecrate ourselves to St. Joseph. That being said, Father Calloway outlines a program of prayer and spiritual reading to help us get to know and love St. Joseph even more. Under his program, even the busiest lay person, with multiple irons in the fire, can find a little time each day to prepare for consecration to this powerful saint. As Father Calloway tells us,

...if you miss a day, don't panic. Just make it up and continue your preparation. You can do this!

When Should We Begin Preparation for Consecrating Ourselves to St. Joseph?

Father Calloway provides a consecration chart in his book that outlines some feast days on which people may wish to consecrate themselves. Working backward from a chosen feast date, we can calculate the kickoff date for our period of preparation for consecration. For example, if we want to make our act of consecration on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, which is March 19th, then we'd begin on February 15th (or the 16th, if in a leap year). To consecrate oneself on May 1, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, you'd start your preparation on March 30th. Father Calloway lists other suggested feast days we might consider as well, including Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Knock, and All Saints Day, to name a few.

A Call to Action—A Call to Consecration

Right now, as you read this, many are readying themselves for preparation for consecration to St. Joseph using Father Calloway's book and approach. Some are preparing for consecration to St. Joseph. Some parishes have begun planning to conduct the preparation and consecration. Some men's ministries are considering it. Men in Knights of Columbus councils and assemblies are considering and planning for it. Whether you are a man or a woman, young or old, St. Joseph is ready and waiting, and now is the time.

St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family, Pray for Us!

SAINT OF THE WEEK GEORGE (d. 300) FEAST DAY 23 APRIL

Martyr and patron saint of England, Portugal, Germany, Aragon, Spain, Genoa, Venice, soldiers and the Scouting Movement and one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. He suffered martyrdom at

Lydda (Diospolis) in Palestine, where his tomb was shown. It is likely but not certain that he was a soldier. The cult was both ancient and widespread, with feasts in the East, where he was called 'megalomartyros', and in the west, where he occurs in the Martyrology of Jerome and the Gregorian Sacramentary. The record and the cult of George considerably precede the Acts which, derived from Pasicrates, who mendaciously claimed to be a witness, survive in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian, and Turkish. An apocryphal *Passion of St. George*, mentioned in a decree of Pope Gelasius as 'written by heretics or schismatics', has never been certainly identified and has probably not survived.

The famous story of George and the Dragon is by no means primitive, but became immensely popular in the West through the *Golden Legend*, translated and printed by Caxton. The dragon, a local pest terrorized the whole country, poisoned with its breath all who approached it. Each day it was appeased with an offering of two sheep, but when these grew scarce, a human victim, chosen by lot, was to be substituted instead. The lot had fallen on the king's daughter, who went to her fate dressed as a bride. But George attacked the dragon, pierced it with his lance, and led it captive with the princess's girdle, as if it were completely tame. George told the people not to be afraid: if they would believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized he would rid them of this monster. The king and people agreed; George killed the dragon and 15,000 men were baptized. George would take no reward, but asked the king to maintain churches, honor priests, and show compassion to the poor. The Legend continued with an account of the sufferings and death of George in the persecution of Diocletian and Maximian, this last point being probably the only historical element in the story.

George has been known in England since the 7th-8th centuries, evidenced by the Martyrology of Oengus. Elfric also repeated the Legend.

The cult of George took on new dimensions for England during the Crusades. A vision of SS. George and Demetrius at the siege of Antioch preceded the defeat of the Saracens and the fall of the town on the first Crusade. The author of the *Gesta Francorum* claimed that George's body was in a church near Ramleh. Richard I placed himself and his army under George's protection. By now he was the special patron of soldiers. At the Synod of Oxford (1222) his feast was made a lesser holiday. Edward III (1327-77) founded under his patronage the Order of the Garter, for which the fine chapel of St. George at Windsor was built by Edward IV and Henry VII. Meanwhile, in 1415 archbishop Chichele had George's feast raised in rank to that of one of the principal feasts of the year: this was after the battle of Agincourt, when Henry V's famous speech invoked St. George as England's patron. But even then, Edward the Confessor and Edmund of East Anglia were not entirely displaced. The cult of George reached its apogee in the later Middle Ages by then not only England but Venice, Genoa, Portugal, and Catalonia regarded him as their patron: for all he was the personification of the ideals of Christian chivalry. He was also numbered in Germany among the Fourteen Holy Helpers. With the invention of gunpowder and the consequent diminution of the importance of sword and lance his popularity faded, a process largely completed by the Reformation. In England, however, he retained his popularity: the most complete surviving cycle of his Legend (with even more fantastic elements) survives in the early 16th century glass at St. Neot's Cornwall, while Spenser declared:

Thou, among those saints which thou doest see,
Shalt be a saint, and thine own nation's friend

And patron; thou Saint George shalt called be,

St. George of merry England, the sign of victory.

His patronage extends to soldiers knights, archers, armourers, and through a pun on the Greek form of his name, to husbandmen also. He was also invoked against the plague, leprosy, and syphilis. His symbol is a red cross on a white field which has been incorporated into the English Jack.

PRAYERS

Prayer to St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church

OGLORIOUS St. Joseph, selected by God to be the foster-father of Jesus, the most pure spouse of Mary, ever Virgin, and head of the Holy Family; therefore chosen by Christ's vicar as the heavenly patron and protector of the Church founded by Christ; with the greatest confidence I now implore thy powerful assistance for the whole Church militant.

Protect in an especial manner, with thy truly fatherly love, the Sovereign Pontiff and all bishops and priests united with the See of Peter. Be the protector of those who labor for souls amid the trials and tribulations of this life, and grant that all the people of the earth may submit with docility to that Church which is the necessary means of salvation for all.

Deign also, dear St. Joseph, to accept the consecration which I make of myself to thee. I dedicate myself to thy service, that thou mayest be ever my father, my protector and my guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me great purity of heart and a servant love for the interior life. Grant that, after thy example, all my actions may be directed to the greater glory of God in union with the Divine Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and thy own. Finally, pray for me, that I may participate in the peace and joy which thou didst enjoy in thy holy death. Amen.

SCHEDULE THIRD WEEK of EASTER SATURDAY 17 - SUNDAY 25 APRIL

Saturday 17 Apr Easter Week

8:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer II

Intention: Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Mass Vigil Third Sunday of Easter

Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

Intention: Mary Gray

Sunday 18 Apr Third Sunday of Easter

7:00 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

Intention: Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr

8:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

Intention: Michael Namura (Deceased)

11:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

Intention: Sean Babineau (Deceased)

