

Dear Members and Friends of St. Stephen, Martyr Parish:

Christ is risen! He is truly risen, alleluia. To Him be glory and power for all the ages of eternity, alleluia (Lk. 24:34; Rev. 1:6).

Easter is celebrated for fifty glorious days beginning today and culminating on the Solemnity of Pentecost. This is the “mother of all feasts”, the origin of every Mass celebrated because we remember the great love of the Father for us, whose Son, Jesus Christ, by dying destroyed death and by rising restored all of us to life. This is the feast of the Passover of the Lord; the new day; the new creation; the new life; the eighth day. Easter reminds us that we have been reconciled with God the Father.

This is the truth of Easter. Our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the Cross has risen and is now alive. He rose from the dead and opened for us eternal life with God. In the Gospel, the message of the Angel to the women who went to see the tomb is encouraging: “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples. ‘He

has been raised from the dead, and indeed He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him.” (Mt. 28:5-7) Like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, this good news should be a cause of great joy for us!

This is the truth that we celebrate today and at every liturgy. Our Lord Jesus Christ is with us and will forever be present in our midst. He is true to His promise. He is alive. He wants to meet us in Galilee. What is the significance of Galilee? It was Jesus’ home. It was where Jesus’ followers lives. it was also the place where many significant events took place as Jesus fulfills His mission. Even now, Jesus wants to meet us where we live. He wants to find a dwelling there. he wants to entrust us with a mission of making His presence known and experienced by everyone.

As His disciples this is the truth that we are called to give witness to in our daily lives. We need to tell the world in which we live, Jesus is risen and He is with us. We need to show the world that we are witnesses to this truth. We are His disciples. We need to be faithful to Jesus who appears to the disciples and assures them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:18-20) a witness is someone who testifies to the truth. It is our responsibility as followers of Jesus to give witness to His truth with the way we live our respective lives. May we show to the world, our society, our community and to our Church that we are people who believe and give witness to the resurrection of Jesus, that we are an Easter People!

These days of Easter also remind us of the beginnings of the Church. It challenges us to continue what Jesus taught His disciples and to live by His example. It teaches us to take courage that despite the challenges we face in our world, the Risen Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is present and active in our lives.

I extend a warm welcome to those who are visiting our parish this weekend. We are pleased that you chose to worship and celebrate this Easter with us. We extend an invitation to those of you who live in the area to become a regular part of the St. Stephen community. The Sunday bulletin lists our Mass times and contact information if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance.

As we celebrate this Easter, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of you who have shared your time, talent and treasure in making our Lenten, Holy Week and Easter celebrations and activities prayerful, beautiful and smooth flowing. To the environment committee and especially Marsha who decorated our church so beautifully, despite the priests’ hidden additions; to the choir and Jessica who brought life to our Triduum and Ester celebrations, to the hospitality committee and those directing traffic, to the altar servers, to the lectors and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, to the many donors and to all who have worked behind the scenes please accept my sincere thanks.

May you and your families have a very blessed Easter.

## SUNDAY REFLECTION

~~Dear Members and Friends of St. Stephen, Martyr Parish:~~

### **READINGS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER / DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY 28 APRIL 2019**

**Acts 5:12-16:** The first disciples continue in their Jewish religious practice and many others swell the number of believers.

**Rv. 1:9-13, 17-19:** John tells of the vision in which he was commissioned to set down in writing all that he has experienced, the realization that the presence and revelation of the Risen Christ guides and challenges the Church.

**Jn. 20:19-31:** The risen Jesus reassures and commissions His fearful disciples on the evening of Easter Day and later to Thomas challenging them to new levels of belief.

### DIVINE MERCY CELEBRATION

**A PRAYER SERVICE AND BENEDICTION WILL BE HELD NEXT SUNDAY, 28  
APRIL AT 3:00 P.M. IN RECOGNITION OF THE FEAST OF THE DIVINE  
MERCY.**

Pope John Paul – now St. Joh Paul II – had actively promoted the message of St. Faustina. In his 1980 encyclical on God’s mercy, *Rich in Mercy*, he developed a scriptural and doctrinal basis for our faith in the mercy of God. By linking the revealed truth about God’s mercy to one of the most solemn Sundays after Easter itself, he illumined the fact that the liturgy already proclaimed the divine mercy. The truth has been embedded for two millennia in the worship of the Church. Once again we see an illustration of the ancient saying, “The law of faith is the law of prayer.”

On the Second Sunday of Easter, the responsorial psalm and Gospel for Cycles A, B and C center on the theme of mercy. In Psalm 118 we sing three times “His mercy endures forever.” The Gospel, from Jn. 20:19-31, begins with the risen Christ appearing to the apostles on Easter night. Jesus calms His disciples by saying and giving them “Peace.” He shows them the scars of His Passion, His wounded hands and side. His glorified body retains the evidence of His saving work through His suffering, death and resurrection. He fills them with joy and again says to them – and produces in them – “Peace.” Then He breathes on them and explains what the divine breathing means with the words, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” He gives the apostles the power of God’s

mercy for the sinner, the gift of forgiving sins from God's treasury of mercy. The other texts speak of healing and give the assurance there is nothing to fear. From Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday to the Eighth Day of Easter, the divine love song of mercy is chanted amid abundant alleluias. For centuries in liturgy the Church has proclaimed the mercy of God through the Word of God and the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The tables of Word and Sacrament are heaped with the promises of Divine Mercy and its grand effect in the lives of millions. The liturgy is the storehouse of the wisdom of God and a treasure chest for all the worshipers.

### **'I Spoke as a Brother'**

A TIME magazine issue in 1984 presented a startling cover. It pictured a prison cell where two men sat on metal folding chairs. The young man wore a black turtleneck sweater, blue jeans and white running shoes. The older man was dressed a white robe and had a white skullcap on his head. They sat facing one another, up close and personal. They spoke quietly so as to keep others from hearing the conversation. The young man was Mehmet Ali Agca, the pope's attempted assassin; the other man was Pope John Paul II, the intended victim. The pope held the hand that had held the gun whose bullet toe into the pope's body.

In the cell, unseen in the picture, were the pope's secretary and two security agents, along with a still photographer and videographer. John Paul wanted this scene to be shown around a world filled with nuclear arsenals and unforgiving hatreds. The Church has always used paintings, sculpture and architecture to communicate spiritual meanings. This was a living icon of mercy.

The Church was celebrating the 1950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christ's death and Christian redemption. The pope had been preaching forgiveness and reconciliation constantly. His deed with Ali Agca spoke a thousand words. John Paul's forgiveness was deeply Christian. He embraced his enemy and pardoned him. At the end of their 20 minute meeting, Ali Agca raised the pope's hand to his forehead as sign of respect. John Paul shook Ali Agca's hand tenderly.

When the pope left the cell he said, "What we talked about must remain a secret between us. I spoke to him as a brother whom I have pardoned and who has my complete trust." This is an example of God's divine mercy, the same divine mercy whose message St. Faustina witnessed.



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## EASTER

### What is the True Meaning of Easter for Catholics?

And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day" Luke 24:46

Easter is the oldest Christian holiday and the most important feast of the ecclesiastical year. In fact, the dates and celebrations of the liturgical year (including all the Christian movable feasts) are arranged around the central Christian feast of Easter.

The Roman Catholic Church always marks Easter on the first Sunday that follows the first full moon of the Spring Equinox. The date therefore changes each year and falls on any day between March 22 and April 25.

Easter Sunday starts the Easter season, marks the end of Lent and is the last day of the Holy Week which is also known as the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday).

The true meaning of Easter has deep significance in our lives as Catholics.

**Easter celebrates Christ's resurrection from the dead. CHRIST IS RISEN**



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## ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH EASTER AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

### 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. As we approach Easter and the end of Lent we use this symbol of fire in a moving Ritual called “The Service of Light” which happens on Holy Saturday night at the Easter Vigil. This leads to the question, “Why do Catholics light an Easter fire? Isn’t this a pagan custom?” The world’s spiritual belief systems make frequent reference to fire. Fire and sun gods can be found in many religions and fire itself often plays an important role in both magical and religious rituals. Often fire is seen as a purifying force. A number of religions attribute special significance to freshly kindled fire. In the ancient world, various ethnic groups, including the ancient Hebrews, kept sacred, ceremonial fires burning constantly, and saw in fire a symbol of the divine. Many of these beliefs and practice find faint echo in past and present Easter fire customs.

### Fire and Light in the Bible

Both the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and the Christian scriptures, the New Testament, describe God in terms of light. Unlike other ancient religious teachings, however, biblical spirituality clearly states that God is not the same thing as light or the sun. rather, God created light and the sun. in fact, the creation of light was one of the first things that God did in shaping the world (Gen. 1:3-4). Although God is something other or greater than light, God’s presence is often accompanied by light, such as occurred at Solomon’s dedication of the Temple (2 Cron. 5:13-14) and at the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:3). The bible also speaks of the gifts of God, such as life, goodness, truth, and wisdom, in terms of light. The Psalmist declares that “the unfolding of God’s word gives light; it imparts truth to the simple” (Ps. 119:130). Godly behavior is also associated with light. Christian scripture demands of its adherents that they “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Ro. 13:12).

In biblical times, fire was the only source of light besides the sun. thus it is not surprising that the Bible likens the appearance of God to fire. The Bible’s Book of Genesis describes God as a smoking fire pot and a burning torch (Ten. 15:17). In the Book of Exodus God takes the form of

a burning bush (Ex. 3:2). When the ancient Israelites fled from slavery in Egypt, God appeared to them by night as a pillar of fire leading them on through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21).

### **Early Christian Easter Fires**

The early Christians celebrated Easter in the middle of the night with a ceremony now called the Easter Vigil. Perhaps in part because of the darkness of the hour, they quickly made the lighting of numerous lamps and torches an important feature of the festival. This custom led some to call the ceremony “the great service of light” and the evening itself “the night of illumination” or “the night of radiant splendor.” An early Christian writer recorded the fact that the emperor Constantine (d. 337) “transformed the night of the sacred vigil into the brilliance of day, by lighting throughout the whole city ... pillars of wax, while burning lamps illuminated every house, so that this nocturnal celebration was rendered brighter than the brightest day”(Weiser, 134). St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394) described Holy Saturday evening as the “glowing night which links the splendor of burning lamps to the morning rays of the sun, thus producing continuous daylight without any darkness” (Weiser, 134). This seeming contradiction, daylight shining at night, echoed the seeming contradiction celebrated in the Easter festival, that is, life emerging from death.

More specifically, the bright light in the darkness served as a symbol of Christ. This interpretation fits with Christian scripture, which describes Jesus as “the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). Another important passage that describes Christ in terms of light declares that “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn. 1:9). Indeed, in Orthodox churches this particular passage (Jn. 1:1-17) is read out loud in several different languages, including Hebrew and Greek, at the Resurrection service held late at night on Holy Saturday.

### **The Paschal Candle**

In Jerusalem, the lighting of the lamps for the Easter feast had taken on a special, ceremonial quality by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This early, ceremonial lamp lighting gave birth to an Easter Vigil custom that survives today: the lighting of the paschal candle with newly kindled fire. The paschal candle is a very large candle used to shed light on the Bible passages read out loud during the Easter Vigil service. In explaining the origins of the paschal candle some researchers point to an ancient Christian service called the *Lucernarium*, a ceremonial lighting of the lamps in preparation for the evening prayer service. As time passed the *Lucernarium* became a service in its own right which included chanting, prayer, and psalms. Scholars believe that the early Christians based the *Lucernarium* on Jewish lamp lighting rituals that preceded evening prayer. In time, however, the Christian observance disappeared. Some commentators think the ceremony that surrounds the lighting of the paschal candle on Easter eve is all that remains of this ancient observance.

Use of the paschal candle spread across western Europe during the Middle Ages. So too, however, did the tendency to schedule the Easter Vigil service at increasingly early hours. As the service crept towards the afternoon, then towards midday, and, by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, into the morning hours, the earlier, lavish use of fire and light as a symbol of Christ lost its impact. In 1955, after a trial period of several years, Roman Catholic authorities ordered the restoration of the Easter Vigil service to Holy Saturday evening, renewing the power of these ancient symbols.

The kindling of new fire is an important part of the ceremony surrounding the paschal candle. The exact origins of the new fire ceremony are uncertain. Some writers believe, however, that

Christians may have borrowed the ceremonial use of new fire from pagan sources. The kindling of fresh flame was an important aspect of the religious rites of the Romans, Greeks, Celts and other ancient peoples.

**Sacred Oils:** Christian sacraments and sacramentals, filled with symbolism, are steeped in historical and scriptural richness. In their celebration, a host of everyday substances are used, serving as signs and symbols of the much deeper realities they represent.

Oil is one of the array of rich symbols we have in our Christian tradition. Today, the Church uses three types of holy oils for a host of purposes. The multifaceted use of oil among ancient peoples is referenced in a variety of scriptural passages. These include use in preparing food for nourishment (see Nm 11:7-9) or as lamp fuel (see Mt 25:1-9). A medicinal use for oil is found in both Old and New Testaments (see Is 1:6; Lk 10:34), or for physical embellishment (see Ru 3:3). Oil is also useful in preparation of bodies for burial (see Mk 16:1) and as a ritual anointing for welcoming guests (see Lk 7:46).

The Church's rites prescribe that the oils are normatively blessed (or consecrated, in the case of chrism) at the Chrism Mass each year. All priests may bless the oil of catechumens and oil of the sick "in case of true necessity."

As evidence of their fruitfulness and importance in our sacramental life, oils take center stage when they are blessed and consecrated just before Easter, at what is called the Chrism Mass. This provides for the new oils to be used at the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

#### **Oil of Catechumens**

The Introduction for the Rite of Blessing of Oils says the oil of catechumens extends the effect of the baptismal exorcisms: "Before they go to the font of life to be reborn, the candidates for baptism are strengthened to renounce sin and the devil."

The notion of being strengthened by oil is scriptural. God's anointing has fortified us in the battle of good versus evil (see Ps 45:8 and Heb 1:9) and enlightens our intellect from falsehood (see 1 Jn 2:27). The prayer of blessing for the oil of catechumens indicates these fruits when it asks God to "give wisdom and strength to all anointed with it," going on to ask God to bring those anointed by this oil "to a deeper understanding of the Gospel" and gain God's help in accepting "the challenge of Christian living."

This oil can be traced back to the early Christian instruction the Apostolic Tradition, written in the early third century, which refers to it as the "oil of exorcism." In the Rite of Baptism today, a prayer of exorcism is proclaimed over the candidate and is followed by the anointing with the oil of catechumens. The anointing with this oil, alongside a prayer of exorcism, may be administered during the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) to adults admitted to the catechumenate.

By the anointing with the oil of catechumens then, it can be said that the recipient gains God's grace and help to overcome the power Satan and sin have over us and profess the Christian faith with boldness, all of which aims toward the newness of life received in baptism.

#### **Oil of the Sick**

The passage most often cited as a scriptural witness for sacramental anointing of the infirm is in the Letter of James (5:14). In Mark 6, Jesus gave the Twelve "authority over unclean spirits" (v. 7), and "they went off and preached repentance" (v. 12). The very next verse, however, indicates the use of oil in healing the sick in Christ's name from even this apostolic age: "They

drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (v. 13).

The oil used most often by priests, its prayer of blessing reminds believers that healing of the sick comes about through Jesus Christ. Oil's multifaceted purpose, mentioned earlier, is indicated when the prayer refers to oil as that "which nature has provided to serve the needs of men."

As the Instruction of the Rite of Blessing of Oils says, in the anointing, "the sick receive a remedy for the illness of mind and body, so that they may have strength to bear suffering and resist evil and obtain the forgiveness of sins." All who receive anointing with this oil receive God's blessing, as the prayer of blessing says, so "that they may be freed from pain and illness and made well again in body, mind and soul."

### **Sacred Chrism**

Before consecrating the chrism, the bishop mixes the oil with balsam — a sweet, aromatic perfume used since ancient times, no doubt in connection to 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, where St. Paul refers to the fragrance of Christ that Christians must disperse everywhere they go. Then, before the prayer of consecration, the bishop breathes over the oil — indicative of the Holy Spirit's descent through invocation.

The verb "consecrate" is applied to the action of making holy the chrism and indicates its use to spiritually separate, sanctify and purify its recipients. While the oil of the sick and the oil of catechumens may, in emergency, be blessed by any priest, this is not the case with chrism. "Consecrate" indicates, then, that only a bishop may bless it.

Christ's holy name means "the anointed of the Lord." The consecratory anointings in the Old Testament are for priests, prophets and kings — all of which point toward and prefigure Jesus Christ. He takes on this identity at the beginning of His public ministry, when in His hometown synagogue He read from Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me" (Lk 4:18). And so the oil of chrism takes its very name from Him and is the means by which Christians become sharers in His royal and prophetic priesthood. "We are called Christians because we anointed with the oil of God," wrote St. Theophilus of Antioch in the second century.

There are two consecratory prayers optioned in the ritual, the first of which draws significant parallels between Christian use of this oil and similar biblical use of oil. The first prayer is one of thanksgiving for God's gifts given in the past, foreshadowing those given through anointing with this oil. In fact in the third-century Apostolic Tradition, it is referred to as the "oil of thanksgiving."

The strength Israel's kings needed in governing earthly affairs with divine guidance was symbolized in their Old Testament anointing (see 1 Sm 10, Samuel's anointing of Saul). The first of the consecratory prayers references King David twice — as he "sang of the life and joy that the oil would bring us in the sacraments," and it was through him that God prophesied that "Christ would be anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his fellow men." In history, a variety of Christian kings and emperors were anointed with sacred chrism by popes and bishops at their coronations.

In the case of Elisha, we learn of the biblical anointing of a prophet (see 1 Kgs 19:16).

Recipients of sacred chrism will prophetically be "radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in (God)."

Priests and bishops today are anointed with sacred chrism at their ordinations. An Old Testament source for this practice is found with Aaron, Moses' brother, whom he anointed a priest (see Ex 29:7 and Lv 8:12).

"Let the splendor of holiness shine on the world from every place and thing signed with this oil," says the second of the consecratory prayers for chrism. Formerly, church bells were anointed on the inside with chrism and the oil of the sick on the outside. The ancient practice of using chrism to consecrate altars and churches remains in practice today.

Using oil to dedicate things to God has Old Testament roots (for examples, see Gn 28:18 or Ex 30:25-29). Altars are set aside for sacrifice and early in Christianity the altar became representative of Christ Himself, the perfect sacrifice. And so, since Christ's name means anointed one, it's most fitting that the altar — which is a symbol of the Anointed One par excellence — itself is anointed. In dedicating a church building, a church's walls are signed with chrism — since the building represents the anointed members of his Body, and, like us are called to be "holy, visible signs of the mystery of Christ and his Church.



## **PRAYERS**

### **An Easter Prayer**

**Good and gracious God,**

**Our most glorious Creator,**

**As we greet the signs in nature around us:**

**Of Spring once again regaling us in bloom,**

**In the songs of returning birds and fields soon to be planted,**

**We give you praise for an even greater sign of new life: the resurrection of your Son,**

**Our Lord Jesus Christ, that we especially celebrate at this time.**

**The sadness and despair of his death has given way to the bright promise of immortality.**

**For the Resurrection is our guarantee that justice will triumph over treason, Light will overcome darkness, and love will conquer death.**

**As we celebrate, we also dare to ask for your grace that we may live the promise given to us,**

**By imitating the life of Jesus in reaching out to the poor, the marginalized, the least among us,**

**As we strive to be neighbor to all those we meet,**

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We ask your special blessings each and every day on our President.  
Working with him may we strive to make this great country of ours a beacon of hope and justice in a world hungry for peace and so in need of your love.  
We praise you in this Easter season. Change our lives, change our hearts to be messengers of Easter joy and hope.  
We make our prayer through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord forever.  
Amen.

- Fr. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, offered at the fourth annual White House Easter Prayer Breakfast on April 8, 2013

### **PASTOR'S UP-COMING SCHEDULE**

**Saturday 20 April Holy Saturday**

**Vigil Mass of Easter 8:00 p.m.**

Blessing of the Easter Fire

Baptism of the Catechumenate

Reception into the Church for the RCIA

**Sunday 21 April EASTER SUNDAY**

**Masses Sunrise Mass 6:30 a.m.**

**8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m.**

**Brig 7:00 p.m.**

Monday 22 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Tuesday 23 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Easter Mass St. Brides Correctional Facility 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday 24 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Easter Mass Indian Creek Correctional Facility 6:00 p.m.

Thursday 25 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Friday 26 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Saturday 27 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.

Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Vigil Mass 2<sup>nd</sup> Sun of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday 5:00 p.m.

**Sunday 28 Apr 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday**

Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m.

**Divine Mercy Prayer Service and Benediction 3:00 p.m.**

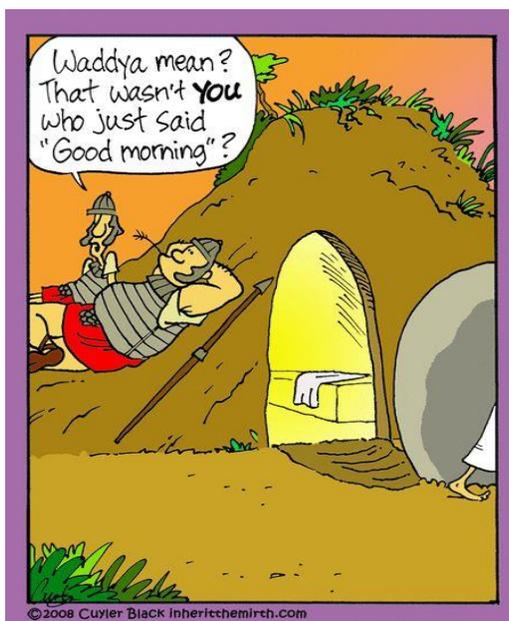
Brig Mass 7:00 p.m.

### **It's not about the bunny, it's about the Lamb**

Jesus did not die on the cross just so we could live comfortable, well-adjusted lives. His purpose is far deeper: He wants to make us like Himself before He takes us to heaven. This is our greatest privilege, our immediate responsibility and our ultimate destiny. (Rick Warren)

**"Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song." - Pope John Paul II**

The death of the Lord our God should not be a cause of shame for us; rather, it should be our greatest hope, our greatest glory. In taking upon himself the death that he found in us, he has most faithfully promised to give us life in him, such as we cannot have of ourselves. - St. Augustine



**I'LL PRAY TO ST. ANTHONY**



**AND FIND ALL THE EASTER EGGS  
BEFORE THE OTHER KIDS**

Easter Fire