

Easter
4.5.26

I had major surgery when I was in sixth grade. My recovery was difficult and lengthy. It was a month before I was able to return to school.

When I was finally moved to my hospital room after the surgery, I couldn't believe how much pain I was experiencing. I was weepy and confused. I was having trouble breathing. My parents stayed with me in those hours which followed the surgery, but returned home when it got dark to take care of my six siblings. They arranged for my cousin Mary, who was a nurse, to spend the night at the hospital with me. She was an angel. Perhaps that perception was made even more real since she wore a white nurse's dress and the nursing cap she wore reminded me of a halo.

In between painful groans and fitful sleep, she held my hand. She wiped away my tears. She put cold cloths on my forehead since I was running a fever. And she gave me little chips of ice to eat because that was all I could tolerate.

When the sun rose and I woke up, my angel was gone. She left just a few minutes before then. My parents showed up shortly after that.

I was still in pain, still emotional and confused, but seemed to have turned the corner a bit with the dawning of a new day.

While in the seminary, several classmates and I served as chaplains for two years at one of the local hospitals. Part of our

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training was to write reflections on our experiences there. After I shared one of my reflections where I recalled that event in the hospital from my childhood, a classmate remarked that my experience probably helped me as I interacted with the patients there. He felt it made me more sensitive to people's suffering. I'd like to think that is true, but I know that isn't always the case.

My experience with having surgery and the long recovery which followed did change me...and I hope for the better.

In the gospel we just heard, two women named Mary returned to the tomb of Jesus. They were exhausted and heart-broken from their experience of watching Christ suffer and die. Their hopes were dashed. They and so many others understood that Jesus was the Messiah. But now they were heading to his tomb to anoint his body.

When they got to the tomb, Mary and Mary Magdalene encountered an angel. The angel stated that Christ was not there and commanded them to go and share the Good News of his resurrection with the disciples. More than likely, in that culture and in those days, such a task would have been a man's job. But changed by that encounter, the two Mary's did as the angel instructed. They were the first to share the Good News of Christ's resurrection with the disciples and with the world. When they returned to the tomb once more, they encountered the resurrected Christ. With that encounter their lives were forever changed. And the lives of all people will never be the same because of Christ's resurrection.

In 1990, the author Morris West published his third novel in a series about the Church called Lazarus. Many of you might be most familiar with the first book in that series, The Shoes of the Fisherman, which was made into a movie.

The story of Lazarus depicted the Catholic Church at the turn of this last millennium. The main character of the story is the pope. While the novel was published over 35 years ago, the name West chose for his character was Pope Leo XIV. In the novel, Leo XIV is a hold-the-line, don't-rock-the-boat kind of pope. Essentially, he was elected as an interim pope. No one thought his papacy would last long or that he would change anything in the Church in the few years most thought he would serve as pope. However, Leo XIV had a heart attack and underwent bypass surgery. During the surgery, he had a near-death experience. That experience changed him forever. It made him more compassionate, merciful, and just. The Curia was not happy with that change and tried to make him resign because of his perceived mental and emotional state. Totalitarian governments throughout the world wanted to assassinate the pope because of his figurative change of heart.

Being baptized, receiving the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist have the power to change us forever. At the great Easter Vigil, nineteen people from our parish entered the Catholic Church and two additional folks were confirmed. I know this is a life-changing moment for all. We who are already baptized renew the promises first made on the day of our baptism. In those promises we reject sin and embrace the love that only God the Father, Son, and Spirit can give. The change of heart that came to us is something that we are called to share

with others. Because the death and resurrection of Christ changed us, we are called to help others experience the gifts of forgiveness and the pledge of eternal life.

Recently, I read a reflection by a woman whose life was upended by a cancer diagnosis. She was in constant pain and was always troubled by how this illness would affect her ability to be with and enjoy her children and grandchildren. In the reflection she recalled a time when one of her daughter's called her out of the blue. The daughter didn't ask the usual question, "how are you doing today, Mom?" Rather, she simply stated, "I just wanted you to know how much I love you!"

That phone call and brief conversation changed the mom's life. She began to focus less on her pain and challenges, and more on using the present moment to love others as she is loved.

A small sign of this powerful change for each of us might simply take the form of telling someone else that you love them. Maybe you want to do that with a family member, but you're holding back because they never say the same to you. Perhaps there's a relative or friend you want to say that to but you're holding back because of how deeply they hurt you and maybe never even apologized to you. Today's celebration reminds us to be overly generous with our love – in whatever form that takes. Be overly generous with your love because that's what Christ does for you – and the power of that love raises us up from our old self to something new and better. And if you're not sure if you have the strength or courage to do this, know that God has surrounded you with his angels and strengthened you with his sacraments

for this task and others like it, just as he did for the two Marys in today's gospel.

Show others that Christ is risen, his resurrection has changed your life, and his power is at work as you offer loving words, simple gestures of kindness to those around you, and engage in just and virtuous acts. Let us show the world from this moment forward that...

Christ ***IS*** risen! He is risen, indeed! Happy Easter!