

A Sermon Preached by  
Fr. Edwin Smith for Easter, year B  
April 12, 2009 at St. Thomas, Menasha, Wisconsin

If you are one of the folks who was dragged here this morning against your wishes, because you feared the sermon would be directed specifically at you, relax. What I have to say is for you, but for everyone else, too.

Easter. The time for many of bunnies, eggs, and jelly beans.

We can laugh at that, but the fact is that many people misunderstand Easter. For them, the holiday is colored eggs, bunnies, new clothes, a break from school, and, possibly, church attendance for the first time since Christmas--or maybe since last Easter!

But Easter more than that. Easter is about Jesus, who died, and is alive today. Yes, it is. But, so what? What difference does it make to you that Christ is alive?

Someone wisely said that the meaning of Easter may be a theological matter. The fact of Easter may be a historical matter, but the gifts of Easter—the benefits of Easter-- are a personal matter. “What difference does the resurrection make in your life?”

First of all, it gives significance to your life. I’m sure all of you have, at one time or another, experienced feeling like no more than a number. I personally experience those feelings every time I have to take a number and stand in line, or are put on hold while I wait to talk to a live person.

But, the resurrection of Jesus Christ shatters such negative thoughts with a powerful gift: **you matter to God.**

That is the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the words of Saint Paul, “I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures.”

Now, that is a powerful personal gift of the resurrection: you matter to God; you, personally. If you had been the only person on earth, he would have died for you.

Then, there is the gift of meaning in your present life. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, “There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning.” I’ve heard it described as the “God-shaped hole in everyone’s heart.” Everyone wants his or her life to make a difference in the world.

Many people, unfortunately, have never had a purpose for their lives. They search and hunt and strive for answers, but always come up short.

Consider the disciples. Good Friday had to be the worst day of their lives. All their hopes and dreams were destroyed. Their once meaningful lives were now empty. But, that was Friday. The disciples learned that the resurrection followed the crucifixion.

Life was put in a new perspective. They had a new direction. They were changed, irrevocably and forever.

The third personal gift of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that it gives hope to your future life. Many people have no hope beyond death. That is a horrible way to live--and an equally horrible way to die.

But for us, the resurrection is ours, too. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." As Peter put it, "now we live in the hope of eternal life, because Christ rose again from the dead." Death is a doorway to life for the believer, and that is a powerful gift, indeed.

Finally, the resurrection gives us victory. The cross had appeared to defeat Jesus. Had Satan won the battle? Did evil conquer righteousness? Had hate smothered love?

People see only the cross at times. However, the cross is not the last part of God's plan.

The fog of life's experiences sometimes causes us to see only our crosses. We are bombarded by defeat. We feel crushed and destroyed. We think the walls are caving in on us. We want so desperately to win.

Well, we can win. We can win through Jesus Christ. Whether it be conquering a bad habit or rebounding from a great loss. We can know we have that victory because the gift of Jesus' resurrection is ours.

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth does make a difference in your life. It provides the greatest gifts of all time to all who believe in him: significance, meaning, and hope for our lives, and the assurance of victory.

My friends, may you know how much he loves you, how much he wants your life to have meaning, how he longs for you to share in his eternal life, and may you know the victory of his resurrection.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!