

Children's Moment *Why do we celebrate Easter?*

Good morning, boys and girls.

I wish we could be together this Easter morning. It's a special day. I hope you and your parents have a wonderful time.

This morning, I have something special to show you. I have a pot filled with plants that Esperanza planted. Aren't they beautiful? They're called succulents, because they like drink water and hold onto it. That helps them to thrive and grow when it gets hot in the summer.

Do you know how these plants started? They were seeds or sprouts. I have an example of one here. See, it's very small. It looks like it's dead. But, if you plant it in good soil, water it and give it the right amount of sun, it'll sprout and grow. It may grow slowly at first, but as it becomes bigger and stronger, it grows up healthy and beautiful.

Jesus is like a seed, planted in our heart. When we hear about Jesus, it doesn't mean a lot to us at first. But, if we listen to our parents and Sunday school teachers and pastors, they'll help the Jesus seed to grow inside of us. Just as we grow slowly at first, so does Jesus' seed. As we get bigger and stronger, it does too, making us healthy and beautiful from the inside.

Best of all, do you know what kind of fruit comes from the Jesus seed? Love. Love blossoms in our heart. We feel the love of our parents, family and friends and we love them back even more each day.

We celebrate Easter because that's the day when Jesus showed us how much he loved us in a way that makes our lives better. Love blossoms on Easter. That's why we come and celebrate our love for God with others every year.

Let's pray ...

Message: “You Will See”

An angel from the Lord rolled the stone away from the tomb, sat on it and said to Mary, “Don’t be afraid. You’re looking for Jesus. He isn’t here. He was raised, just as he said. See where he was placed. Now, go quickly and tell the others, ‘He is risen from the dead ... you will see him ...’” (Matthew 28:5-7. MSG, my paraphrase).

Don’t be afraid. You’re looking for Jesus. He’s risen from the dead. You’ll see him. Powerful words spoken on the first Easter morning; they reveal much to those who have eyes to see.

What do you see?

Easter Sunday is the pinnacle of the church year. There’s no other Sunday more anticipated than today. There’s no other Sunday with as much preparation and planning as today, particularly since it’s the first-ever Easter online. People around the world are gathering in assemblies, societies, chapters, orders, halls, congregations and households. They’re looking for something.

What do you see?

This year, more than any other, the experience has been distilled down to its essence. We know what we aren’t gathered to do. We aren’t gathered for the pancake breakfast, coffee hour, handshakes, hugs and kisses, or admiring Easter hats and outfits. We aren’t gathered for the lilies or the stained glass or the comfortable setting or even the joy of each other’s company. That’s all been stripped away.

What do you see?

What you see before you is a teacher and his loving partner. You see others by video, recorded earlier this week. You see each other by ZOOM or chat or text or phone. You remember the connection, the good times together and the way you comforted, prayed and cared for each other during difficult times.

You see the familiar but in a new setting. We worship, praise God, sing songs, pray, give offerings, all the things we usually do. The old story is here, but it’s presented in a new way. It’s like reading your favorite book and then seeing it made into a film. It’s the same, yet different. Some things we like, others we don’t. We long for things to

be the way they were, yet we know, deep down in our hearts, life has changed. Things will never be the same.

What do you see?

You see choices. We can turn away or we can press on. We can timidly fade away or we can have the conviction to live with quiet courage. We can remember the old story while embracing new ways. What's most important is for people to know the message, the truth of what's revealed through our lives and the lives of those who went before us. That's the way of faith, hope and love. That way is steady and sure.

What do you see?

You see words written down, narrating the lives and experiences of Jesus' followers, his family and friends. We read them earlier. These words create visual pictures in our minds. That's the power of the words. By speaking them, we activate our imaginations, setting them free to explore heavenly vistas unseen, plunging into spiritual depths that refresh us with the thrill of discovery.

What do you see?

What you don't see is a parade waiting for Jesus to emerge from the tomb. You don't see Peter at the head of the disciples, waiting for Jesus' appearance on the third day. You don't see any temple priests, scribes, the governor or political leaders waiting for word of Jesus' resurrection.

The day after Jesus died, there were no Christians. There were no followers. There were only mourners and people who were grieving and afraid. Jesus' disciples were waiting for the authorities to knock on their door and for their cross to be set up right next to Jesus'.

What do you see?

You see humans struggling to comprehend the unusual and supernatural. What happened at the tomb can't be easily or simply be explained. It's outside the box. The people in Jesus' time didn't understand it any more than we do today. And we don't understand it any better than those who are to come.

There were people at the tomb that morning; two groups of people. Let's look at what occurred from their point of view.

The first were the guards sent by the authorities to make sure people didn't steal Jesus' body and claim he was resurrected. The second were the women, coming to tend to Jesus' body. Mary Magdalene was leading them.

What did the guards see?

The guards experienced an earthquake that rolled the stone away from the tomb, breaking the seals placed on it. Matthew tells us the guards saw an angel dressed in snow white garments who looked like lightning. They were so afraid they were paralyzed. They couldn't move or speak.

Whatever the guards saw, it shook them to their core. Their very lives were on the line to guard the tomb, yet they had no power over what transpired. All they could do was watch. They saw and they were afraid. We don't like the Old Testament when it tells us to fear the Lord, yet it does, over and over again. If we're working against God's will, we should be afraid.

What did Mary Magdalene and the other women see?

They saw the angel and were afraid, but their fear was more like awe. How do you respond when you're faced with the supernatural? Just talking about it makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

God's messenger put them at ease. *"Don't be afraid."* The angel was ready. The angel knew why they were there, who they were looking for and what to show them. They looked. They saw. Minds spinning, the women heard the angel deliver the message, *"Go tell the others, 'He is risen from the dead ... you will see ...'"*

What would you think if you saw an angel, looked in the empty tomb and heard the message? I don't know about you, but I'd be amazed at what I saw, while trying to make sense of it all. It was the same for them. As they ran back to tell the others, the women were filled with joy. That's when things go sideways. Jesus stops them their tracks. *"Good morning!"* he says (Matthew 28:9, MSG).

What do they do? What we'd do. They fall down, grab him tightly and worship him. Jesus says, *"You're holding on to me for dear life! Don't be afraid. Go tell the others ... they'll see me"* (vv8-10).

What do you see?

Seeing goes beyond our physical senses. Seeing has another meaning. It also means “to see with the mind” - to see spiritually, or to perceive, in the sense of having an inward spiritual awareness. We can't go back to that day and re-create what the women saw. But we don't need to.

The women saw the living God. They were eye witnesses. Against all the evidence, Mary experienced Jesus as he really, truly is, the son of God. The words don't do justice to the moment, yet there's something. We're caught. There's a mystery here. We don't understand it, but it calls to us, to our spirit.

What do you see?

I see a new life. There's a glimpse of what lies beyond this world. Jesus pulls the veil back and gives us a peek into heaven and life after death. The life to come transcends life as we know it now. Our spiritual life, weak as it may seem to us now, is a treasure. It shines more brightly than we know.

When we're part of Jesus, our spirit begins to flourish and grow.

The love that fills us runs out of space and flows into the lives of everyone around us in chaotic ways, exuberant and joyful, like a child. We have a message of faith, hope and love to share. The love we have for others is part of the love God has for us all. All our lives are made better, here and now, in the future and in the life to come. That's God's grace in action.

The only question that remains is, “What do you see?”

Let us pray ...

Reflection & Prayer

“Lord, make our lives a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Grant each of us the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness.

May the Holy Spirit speak through the lips of your servants who proclaim your Word.

Send your comforting Spirit to all who are in trouble and distress.

Send your comforting Spirit to all who are victims of injustice.

Keep all nations from hatred and war.

Gather together all the nations by the breath of your Spirit.

Jesus our joy, in your presence we find forgiveness, the clear flowing waters. Thirsting for the realities of God, we recognize your presence as the risen Lord. And just as the almond tree begins to blossom in the light of springtime, you make even the deserts of the soul burst into flower.”¹

Fill us with abundance grace and love and give us eyes to see.

In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

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¹ https://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html?id_document=5837

Matthew 28:1–10 (CEB)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. Look, there was a great earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven.

Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it. Now his face was like lightning and his clothes as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn’t here, because he’s been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, ‘He’s been raised from the dead. He’s going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’ I’ve given the message to you.”

With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. But Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there.”