

The Easter Community

We are blessed to celebrate Holy Baptism today (at the 9:00 and the 11:15 liturgies). Baptisms are especially a celebration of new life in the season of Easter. We had baptisms at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Day. Today is the 5th Sunday in Easter. We have three weeks to go before Pentecost Sunday.

Easter brings an explosion of love; a love so strong that the world was changed forever. How else can we understand Jesus' resurrection. It's impossible to understand how Jesus rose from the dead after three days with his same physical body that some recognized, others didn't. He seems to come and go suddenly on the first Easter Day, appearing five different times. He appears four more times over several weeks, including at least twice, more than 100 miles north of Jerusalem in Galilee. On the 40th day after the Resurrection, he appears outside Jerusalem and "ascends" to heaven, disappearing physically forever.

These 10 appearances of the Risen Lord Jesus are difficult to comprehend – how, why, when, where did he come and go? What we do understand is the love he brought to all those who witnessed the Resurrection. This love was stronger than physical death. This love was a powerful affirmation of all he taught and did, especially that last week in Jerusalem. This love inspired the disciples to become apostles, and witness to the power of love to all the world.

The love of God in the Risen Jesus was so powerful that an entire community of believers formed immediately. The believers in the power of love encouraged others and soon, within a decade of the Resurrection, there were hundreds, thousands of believers in community. These "Easter Communities" became the early Church, known as Christ's Body, growing throughout the world.

John witnessed this growth for fifty or more years after Jesus' resurrection. When he wrote his Gospel and letters at the end of the first Christian century, the Church had already grown throughout the entire Mediterranean world. So John could write, "God is love ... everyone who loves is born of God and knows God..."

The first century believers knew what we know – Jesus is love incarnate. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. We are able to love because God first loved us. Only by staying connected to Jesus' love, the vine, can we grow and bear fruit on the branches. The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are the ways we stay connected to Jesus, the vine of love.

The biggest threat, the greatest challenge to love, that which threatens to detach us from the vine of Jesus' love is fear, fear growing from anxiety. John writes, "There is no fear in love, perfect love casts out fear..." The Church as the Easter Community helps us to perfect our love, to face our fears, to understand our anxieties. Our life together in community is a process of trying to make our love more perfect.

This is what we try to teach our children – to grow in perfecting love. To know love isn't about getting, it's about giving. To know love is not about ourselves, it's about others. To know God's love for us, Jesus' love for us, so we can love others. We love because God first loved us. We learn how to love, as we come to understand how Jesus loved.

I can't imagine a life without the sacraments of the Easter Community, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These two sacraments are visible, physical realities celebrating God's love for us. These two sacraments ask us to follow the Great Commandment, the New Commandment of Jesus, to love God and to love our neighbor.