

Easter Day
April 5, 2015
Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose
Acts 10:34-43
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

Happy Easter! We have maneuvered through the solemn forty days of Lent, and arrived at the greatest day of celebration for Christians around the world. We celebrate the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was not the resuscitation of someone whom they thought was dead, but an EMT team was able to give CPR and revived him. This was something beyond our medical knowledge and beyond our understanding. Jesus was not raised like his friend Lazarus, back to the old life, to live on for a few years. Jesus was alive again, but alive in a different way, having a new dimension of life that marked the beginning of his journey back to the Holy Father; but even beyond that, he would soon be with the Father and at the same time would share his Spirit with everyone who would make the decision to receive his Spirit.

This is quite amazing stuff, but what does it really do for you and me? How does it make our life better or easier? Well, the answer to that leads me into the topic of spiritual discernment, as it was taught by the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola. He lived in the early 1500's, and is well known for a manual he wrote for the spiritual formation of his followers – it was called *Spiritual Exercises*. These Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are used today. People sign up for a thirty day retreat that includes meditations on such themes as the life and ministry of Jesus, and his death and resurrection. The goal of this retreat is to discern a person's path in life that can lead them to glorifying God.

Ignatius identified two experiences that help us discern God's activity in our life. These terms are spiritual desolation and consolation. Listen to this list of characteristics that describe our experience of desolation or consolation;

Time of Desolation:

Turns us away from God, and inward on ourselves
Cut us off from community
Crowds out our distant vision
Drains us of energy

Time of Consolation:

Turns us toward God, and focused beyond ourselves
Bonds us more closely to our human community
Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
Shows us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us
Releases new energy in us

The boundary between these two poles of experience is sometimes fuzzy. I met with some clergy people last week, and in that meeting we discussed these experiences of desolation and consolation in our lives. One of the men in the group described that his wife has a very rare neurological disease that causes her to be in almost constant pain. The pain is disabling, and sometimes limits her ability to even move. There are times she cannot go outside, even for a walk. She feels the isolation and pain of her disease, and her husband feels deep compassion and caring over what she goes through. Over the years, they know that there will be times of an hour, or sometimes a few hours, that the pain goes away. These windows of relief are celebrated, and they thank God for them. The man shared that they have discovered that the consolation part of her illness has made the desolation times easier to manage. There is a spiritual dimension to the difficult times; there is a sense of God's grace in those difficult times. They know that God is still with her in those difficult times, and that there will be times to celebrate windows of relief. In fact the good times are even better because of the reality of the difficult times. Does that make sense? I think it does. I can think of difficulties we go through that, if we look at the spiritual dimension of them, and if we think of the blessed times that we have already experienced, there is a moving closer to God that happens in the mix.

Jesus experienced spiritual desolation in his betrayal by Judas, abandonment by his disciples, his fearful prayers in Gethsemane, and torture by the Roman occupation forces. Jesus faced desolation, but always with a response that moved him toward God. "Father, if you are willing, let this cup pass from me; however not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) He knew the consolation that was there for him; he knew that there would be an Easter morning. He knew that God's grace was with him.

Easter Day is about the resurrection of Jesus. It is also about the celebration of Jesus working through the experiences of desolation to find God; and the reality that Jesus seized the times of consolation – living in the center of God's will.

Easter Day changes your life and mine, because we see that the experiences of both desolation and consolation can move us closer to God. In our Palm Sunday days, God is with us. In our Good Friday days, God is with us. In our Easter Days, God is with us. Which direction is your life taking you: toward God or away from God? The Easter event shows the choice we have been given: Jesus Christ has defeated desolation, he has beaten death and he lives today, giving his Spirit to all who ask for it, so that every experience in our life can be an experience of God's grace. This is the gift we celebrate today.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.*