

## **Easter Sunday**

4.16.17

Acts 10:34, 37-43; 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8;  
Matthew 28:1-10

### **AN EXPLOSION OF NEW LIFE**

The recent uproar over the passenger removal incident that took place on a United Airlines flight last week reminded me about a problem one of the priests from my religious order had a few years ago. Father Kevin flew from Wilmington, Delaware, to Philadelphia to preside at the baptism of some friends' new baby. The baby's name was Peter Jude and the baptism went very well – the baby appreciated the warm water of the sacrament and didn't cry. Unfortunately, Kevin couldn't stay too long at the family reception following the baptism because he had to immediately get back to Wilmington for a meeting. As he was in line at the airport security screening checkpoint, he was randomly selected by a rather stern TSA agent who promptly and thoroughly frisked him. You remember the routine they used a few years back. The agent dabbed your clothes and hands with something that looked like an oversized bandaid. After the security agent placed the limp plastic sheet into a scanner, he soberly asked Kevin to step aside behind the steel machinery and was told that his hands showed evidence of a Class E-6 explosive.



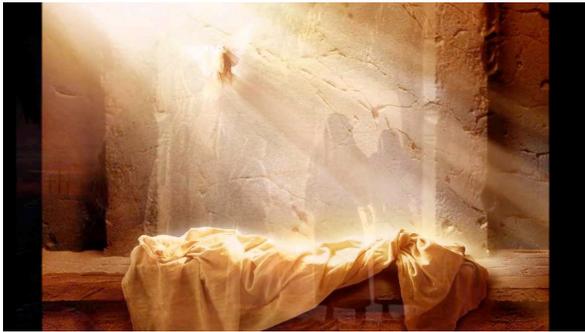
Finding some humor in all this, Kevin explained to the agent that he was a Catholic priest and had just performed a baptism that included a generous slathering of sacred chrism – olive oil mixed with sweet-smelling balsam. He suggested

perhaps that's what was triggering the irregular reading. Without any humor, the agent asked him to remove parts of his clothing. More swabbing and further testing eventually showed that Kevin was not a threat to international safety, and he processed to Gate C-28, which, fortunately, was, next to a bar where he was able to enjoy a quick and much-needed pint of Guinness to toast baby Peter Jude and his own safe passage through security.

Although the sacramental symbol of baptism proved to be a false alarm at the Philadelphia airport, we are mistaken if we think that our initiation into the life of Christ and the community of the Church is a tame and domesticated affair. This Easter faith which we celebrate, our belief that Jesus is risen from the dead, is explosive. If it weren't, how could that faith have motivated the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer to stand as an anti-Nazi dissident and die in the concentration camp for his faith? Or motivated Dorothy Day to open Catholic Worker houses in the 1930's during the Great Depression to give shelter to the homeless? Or motivated Archbishop Oscar Romero, the bishop of El Salvador, to denounce his government that was persecuting the poor, which led to his assassination as he was saying mass proclaiming Jesus' resurrection?

There is a power at work in our faith that gives some among us the courage to face terminal illness with courage, others the willingness to forgive someone who betrayed you, to others the energy to work tirelessly for the good of your children, the enthusiasm to do your best at work, in school, in your home, the determination to stand against the crowd when you know they are headed in the wrong direction, the generosity to support your parish community by your prayer and with your time and treasure, your dedication to love others without counting the cost. Did you

listen carefully to the details of Matthew's account? – *a great earthquake, an angel descending from heaven, a giant stone rolled back by a heavenly being who looks like lightning and who scares the pants off the big, burly guards who "became like dead men."* This is some power at work here and we're part of it. As St. Paul reminds us: *We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.*



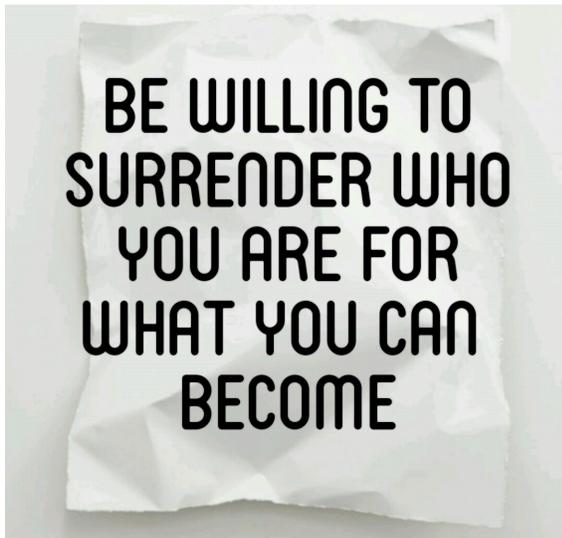
In her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, author and poet Annie Dillard hints at the annoyance she feels when Christians fail to live out their baptismal commitment: *"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."* This faith of ours isn't for weaklings.

We've kept the annual exercise of Lent, not as an endurance test, but as a kind of forty-day retreat to remind ourselves and each other about the life and grace that is ours because of our union with Christ in the sacrament of Baptism. This morning those forty days culminate in the renewal of our baptismal promises, reviving the luster of those words and reinvigorating their meaning and implication for our daily living. Last night at the Easter Vigil, for Ruben Haro, these promises were made for the first time and they touched him on two levels – in his personal commitment to Jesus Christ and in the bond he has experienced within the community of the Church. Kristen O'Brien, who was previously baptized in another Christian denomination, made her faith home in the community of the Catholic Church, and was received into full communion.

When we're baptized, our names are recorded. Every parish church has such a registry and meticulously records each name. Ruben and Kristen's names will likewise be recorded in our official parish registry. This is more than merely a record of our membership in the Church, as if you were joining a club or receiving citizenship. It's a sign that our names are treasured by God. We are enrolled as members of Christ's household and we belong to the One who never forgets anyone. We heard the passage a few weeks ago at Sunday mass from the prophet Isaiah: *Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. Behold, I have carved you on the palm of my hand.* To be held so dearly in God's eyes should give us great comfort and reassurance. And to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ should give us a little trepidation, because the power that was unleashed in Christ's rising from the dead is the same power that is conferred upon us in

the Sacrament of Baptism. Can you imagine what our world might be like if the 2.1 billion of us baptized Christians – one third of the world's population – lived out our baptismal commitment to the full, each day?

As I was drinking my Good Earth tea one evening, I noticed that the little holder at the end of the string had a saying on it, like a fortune cookie, although it was much more serious than a fortune cookie. It was a quote from the theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr that said: *Surrender who you are for what you could become.* Maybe that's our Easter challenge this year if the Lord's Resurrection is to bring us new life. What do you need to surrender – fear, hesitation, anxiety, indifference, self-doubt, arrogance, materialism – in order to know what you can become – instruments of hope and transformation, messengers of New Life and Good News to our world which, even if it doesn't always acknowledge it, hungers for faith, hope and love, and the peace that the Risen Lord left us as his gift to all who share in His life.



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