

## APRIL 25, 2021: FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



When I was in kindergarten my Mom returned to school to get her master's in education. She had decided that she was going to enter the world of teaching. The issue was that some of her classes were at the same time I was being dismissed from school. My grandmother, MiJulie, offered to pick me up and take care of me in order to help my Mom get her degree. I remember those times with a great sense of affection; it was a real time of bonding for my grandmother and me. We would play all sorts of games as we drove from school to whatever errands MiJulie would need to run. One of my favorites was "I spy." MiJulie would say, "I spy something green."

Then I would have to look around to see if I could guess what it was by asking questions. I have to admit that it would keep me pretty engaged. These times with my grandmother will always remain very special memories for me: it was our time together and she really *was* a pretty awesome person.

We all have these kind of memories that stand out in our lives—those moments that are truly poignant and remain with us forever. They can help create a filter of how we view those special times in our life, and even the relationship that we had with those involved. Many times these cherished memories are also moments we really want to share with others. They can help others gain a better insight into who we are, and what is really important and special to us.

If we look at the Gospels, we can recognize a similarity in how the events of Jesus' life are presented. What was most important to the Apostles and the other disciples was the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life and the events that followed. What comes across clearly is that those last hours and following events take up a disproportionate amount of the overall narrative of Christ's life. And in fact, for all the Gospels, the rest of the narrative really is filtered through that time period. What happened during those hours will be the prism through which the Apostles will understand the totality of the ministry and life of Jesus.

It was the most significant moment, not just of their lives, but of all of human history. It was the moment that changed their lives. As Catholics, as Christians, we must believe that we cannot be saved except by the actions of Christ. His embracing of the Paschal Mystery (his passion, death, resurrection and ascension) became the only means for any human being to be saved. For a Christian to deny this truth is an act of heresy; it is a denial of the very reason our faith exists. No human being, Christian or non-Christian, can be saved except through the blood of Christ. Our salvation comes through our acceptance of what Christ has done for us and our willingness to participate in the saving acts of Christ. And how do we participate in these saving acts? Through the sacraments.

The sacraments are often misunderstood as things that *we* do. Many people look at them as rites of passage as we move through life, but the central truth of the sacraments is *not* discovered in what *we* do; they are not about *us*. Rather, the sacraments are centered in the living God who is calling us to experience the compassionate mercy He desires to bestow upon us. When we experience God in mystery, we come to experience his mercy and compassion.

The purpose of the sacraments, therefore, is found in Christ's earthly ministry: both his preaching and his actions. We know that God sent his only Son *not* to condemn us, but to save us. Everything Christ was about was directed to our salvation. And our salvation is discovered in his death and resurrection. Christ came to both show us the way to salvation and to be the way of salvation. And the sacraments are the instrument that He bequeathed to us, so that we may experience the salvation He won for us. In the sacraments, we recognize that God's saving actions—through the unique historical reality in Christ—remain truly available to us, and not *simply* by remembering them; his saving actions are made present to us through the sacraments. God's grace and mercy enable us *not* simply to place our faith in what Christ has done for us, but to truly *experience* what He has done for us. Salvation in Christ remains an ongoing concern. We will never be forgotten or forsaken by our God. In the sacraments, we experience the reality of God's grace through our encounter with Christ, and of God's saving mercy through the power of the Paschal Mystery. The sacraments, then, lead us to become a community of people whose lives are centered in Christ. The sacraments define the purpose of this community of faith, which is to live our lives as a people saved in Christ, in order to proclaim that salvation to the world.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at [fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org](mailto:fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org).

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Brian