

If you're anything like me, Easter just wasn't the same this year. No Easter breakfast. No egg hunt. No packed pews. No Alleluia choruses. But worst of all, no us—no you and no me—no fellowship with the brothers and sisters of Ascension.

Last Sunday, when some of you pulled in for drive-up Communion, I could see it in your faces. Something had dampened your spirits, and it wasn't the storms that were moving in that day. This social distancing is taking its toll. It's keeping us from our big annual Easter celebration. It is stealing our joy. And robbing us of our hope. It's making it so that it just doesn't feel like Easter at all.

But y'know, even if we missed it, even if we didn't feel it, even if—with everything going on around us—we couldn't see it, Easter still came.

I mean, this year we're in good company. Centuries ago, it didn't feel much like Easter for Jesus' followers either. In the Gospel Reading, we find them just like us, hunkered down in their homes. Only it wasn't for fear of COVID-19, but "for fear of the Jews." The disciples had just seen their Lord and Master get nailed to a cross. Now, they were afraid they'd be next, so they locked up their doors. I can just see it now—Peter installing a fresh deadbolt, or James putting in a new door chain, and John wedging a chair under the knob. Maybe they even got some 2x4s and boarded up the doorway. And then they went and found a dark corner of the room, huddled together, and shivered with fright. For them, there were no traces of Easter anywhere either

Except, that didn't stop Easter from coming! Who knows how the risen Christ found His way in there. All we do know is that in spite of "the doors being locked...Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."" *Ta-da!* Can you imagine! There you are, one second you're quaking in your boots, waiting for the next shoe to drop, thinking the worst is about to happen any moment. Then, the next second everything changes. There's Jesus standing right before your very eyes!

You blink once, then twice, wondering, *Could it be? Is that really Him?* Yup, He even shows you His hands where the nails were, and His side where the spear was. Here He is—Jesus Christ, in the flesh! Back from the dead! All risen! All resurrected! Nothing can stop Easter!

There's just one thing I want to point out though. Typically, it's this Sunday that we pick on Thomas. We call him "Doubting Thomas." The Church gets on His case every year for not believing his fellow disciples that Jesus had been raised to life. But look, it's eight days later when Jesus shows Himself again—to the disciples for once more but then also to Thomas as well.

And where do we find them all this time around? Back to their old tricks! Although it's been a whole week since most of them had already seen the risen Christ, the text repeats that "although the doors *were locked*, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."" Anyone else getting déjà vu? Like, why are the doors locked a second time? Jesus is risen! There's nothing to fear. Easter happened! The disciples had already seen it! Even if it was Thomas who had locked up the place this go-around, wouldn't the others have just as quickly said there's no need for that! Maybe they wouldn't even be home, but would be out busy spreading the Good News! But that's not what they do.

It's just like us, isn't it? We know Easter came. We know Easter happened. We know full-well nothing can stop Easter. But then we go back to our old state of mind, our former way of life. It's as if we never knew about Easter to begin with. Each of us does it in our own way.

Some of you, you're dealing with health issues or grieving the loss of a loved one, and while that is definitely sad and tragic—no question—the way you go about it is as if there was no resurrection of the dead. Or for others, you're handling sin like Christ hasn't already freed you from it to live a new godly life. Still others of you just feel downright hopeless, or bored, or struggling to make sense of things, and it's taking the life out of you. And if that's how it is for you

right now—pay close attention. Because Easter still comes. There's no way to keep it from happening. Not even sin or death or the things of this world can get in its way. Nothing can stop Easter!

You might not realize it, as you're shaking like a leaf, crouched in the shadows, hiding behind all kinds of defense mechanisms. But right now, the risen Christ stands among you. His wounds and side are beside you. He whispers, "Peace be with you." That's reality—that's what's really real. Let that be what dictates your perception of the world. See everything through the lens of His resurrection, because it's the one thing that's true. Easter is, as Dorothy Sayers once put it, "the only thing that has ever really happened."

Learn from the once scared and skeptical Apostle Peter, who will become so convinced of Easter that he boldly gets up in front of a crowd of Jews. He'll say to them, "This Jesus God raised up. We are all witness to that fact" (Acts 2:32, Common English Bible). Did you catch that—note that Jesus' resurrection is spoken of as a "fact." The resurrection is not something that happens only in human imagination or emotion. It isn't some indistinct, vague fantasy. The resurrection is a "fact," an event that took place in human space and time.

The apostles had a rough start at first, but eventually they caught on. They threw open their locked doors and dared to step out in light of the resurrection. Every single one of them became so convinced of the fact of Easter that there wasn't a single aspect of their lives that it didn't touch. Even more, almost all of them staked their lives on it. And when you see Easter as a matter of fact too, when Easter has its way with you like it did the apostles, then buckle your seatbelt because Easter is about to change your life!

Now, you and I, we could always slip once again into regular routines and fall back into old patterns. We could return to life as we knew it before Easter. Even in the midst of this Easter season, we could choose to live as if it never really happened. But that would be off-base, wouldn't it, out-of-touch with reality.

Let me give you an idea of how absurd that would be. In 2005, two elderly men emerged from the dense jungle of a Philippine island. Yoshio Yamakawa, 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 85, declared that they were Japanese soldiers. They were discovered when a Japanese mediator for a veteran's group was searching for the remains of some former soldiers. It was then, that he was contacted by these two old men. According to the story, they'd been there ever since Japan invaded the Philippines in 1941. Just mere hours after the bombing at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese went on to conduct a brutal occupation of the Philippine islands. After their ranks had been devastated by U.S. forces, the two soldiers had hid themselves in the jungle and mountains afraid of being court-martialed for desertion if they ever showed their faces again. Can you imagine, 60 years after World War II was over, these two men still believed they were fighting in it! Talk about living in another universe! Well, that's what it would be like to live without Easter.

It might be that Easter isn't the same this year . . . but that can be a good thing! Maybe like the apostles, Easter will take hold of you like never before! Because regardless of how it seems, Easter has come. Nothing can stop Easter!

Today, let it hit you—*Hey, Easter really happened!* The victory is won! Death is conquered! Sin is vanquished! Our world will never be the same! And after today, neither will you.