

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

2nd Sunday of Easter, April 24, 2022

We know our lives and our world are constantly changing. It is no different in the life of the Church. This is the time of year for changes of priests and new assignments come and reminded us too about these changes. I want you know that there will a change this summer at Our Lady of the Holy Souls. As of July 1st, I will become a Senior Pastor, staying in residence here, at Holy Souls. When my time comes, I will have been Pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Souls for six years and one month - my longest assignment ever in the Diocese of Little Rock. I am proud to be your Pastor. As a Senior Priest I will be free to pursue work in Spiritual Direction, retreats, and helping out my brother priests when needed.

However, it's time for me to pursue God's will and serve the church in a different way. You will still see me around, but not as often at Church or at Masses. The Bishop has assigned Fr. Daniel Velasco to be the next Pastor here, with my approval. I love Fr. Daniel. He is a great priest, and I will be working alongside him in the work of Spiritual Direction. Also as a side note, Fr. Daniel is an excellent tennis player. It might be time to start a Tennis team here at Holy Souls. You will also be getting an associate Pastor, Fr. Baskar from Christ the King. He is a very happy and friendly young Priest who loves being with the children on the playground, playing soccer. With Jim Goodhart and Ted Saer being ordained Deacons, well, how much does God love Holy Souls? There will be not one, but two Priests, and another one hanging around - me, and three deacons. There is not a church in Arkansas more blessed than Holy Souls!

As I enter into my 12th change of assignment since being ordained, I don't know if this is even possible, and if it's alright with you, Holy Souls could be my last Parish assignment. Therefore, I declare Holy Souls my Home Church, from this day forward. Like I said I am a blessed Priest, and you, my friends, will always have a place within my heart. Remember me in your prayers and I will remember you.

Life is always changing, the Easter season continues for 40 days, so that we can learn and grow in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is about the inner transformation that the power of the Risen Christ brings to us. It is a spiritual makeover. As I mentioned at Easter, not like the TV shows about the outward appearances, but this Easter, the makeover has to do with our relationship with Jesus the Risen Lord. Before us is a superficial makeover which is only skin deep or a Christian Easter makeover which is about in depth transformation of the inner heart and soul. One is very temporary; the other is Eternal. The light of Risen Christ wants to illuminate us deeply within our core, opening up the dark spaces in our existence, so that the image and likeness of God in which we were created can once again shine.

Jesus Christ speaks to us today in God's word about His grace that enlightens the soul, with the light of the Risen One. We have to come to a strong and firm belief in this mystery, otherwise we can fall into doubts and fears. I believe two of the stumbling blocks of the Easter Season are fear and doubt. As we enter more deeply into this relationship with Jesus into our hearts, minds, and souls, we will change for the better and lessen the enemies of Easter within us.

Jesus the Christ, the Light of the world, casts light on our fears, according to the Book of Revelation. He reaches out to us with his outstretched hand to draw us closer to him, once again healing those parts of us that have fallen into darkness, addictions, sins that allow shadows to hang over us. Jesus has come to free us, and shine His light upon us, we who walk in that light, are free. If we are dealing with fears, remember Perfect Love cast out all fears.

As we open our hearts to the Light of the Risen Christ, like in Acts of the Apostles, we see examples of what can happen. Other people will be drawn to us and don't understand why. Our church community grows, because they can see the work of Jesus being lived out. The great example in Acts is with Peter and John, the people were coming to them bringing their suffering and brokenness into the shadow of Peter and John. This is how much the power of the light of Christ was shining out through Peter and John. People believed that getting into their shadow they could be healed. These people, suffering physically, mentally, and spiritually, believed if they could get near these Apostles of the Risen Christ, they would be blessed. Their faith was reaching out just as the people did during the days of Jesus of Nazareth. Now through the intercession of the Apostles Christ still lives. This is our calling this Easter Season, to allow the Easter message to live within us.

What about our doubts? In John's Gospel, the Crucified and Risen Jesus enlightens our minds especially in those areas in which we have doubts like Thomas. For us it would be the doubts that our world and culture darkens our minds with lies and falsehoods that we are faced with every day. It makes us doubt in God, in Jesus, the Risen Lord, the Church, doubts, doubts, doubts that we get to the point like the state of Missouri saying of "Show Me." Show me the Risen Lord and then I will believe. If I don't see, it I will not believe. If I don't see it, then it's not real. It is also not Faith, for Faith is believing in the One who loves us, we do not have to see Christ to believe in Him. Or believe in the power of His love to change us, and change those around us. Change is constantly happening, let's make the change count for something that is lasting and eternal in this passing world.

It is sad today that many Christians do not really believe in Jesus. Because they are unable to see the Love of God that has been planted in their hearts at Baptism. The love that lives so deeply within each one of us that the only way to discover it is through pray and being obedient to God's word, like "*Keeping Holy the Sabbath Day*". It is sad that our Church is not as full as it was last week. If only we gave ourselves over to this loving mystery that can change all things for the better. The two things that would have to die is Fear and Doubt.

The Risen Christ is alive and in our midst. Let us ask the Lord to help us all surrender to this Easter Faith. When I was first ordained a Priest, I remember standing out the doors of St. Michael's in West Memphis, after I locked the doors, I turned around looked up to the heavens with a heart full of Joy, saying "*I am yours Jesus, use me as you will.*" With a heart full of joy and gratitude I say it again today, "*Jesus I am yours, use me as you will.*" As you receive the Risen Lord today, say to Jesus "*I surrender to you, use me as you will.*" Then the Light of Christ will shine all the brighter in the Body of Christ.