

## Pastor's Ponderings . . .

This is the month that Easter begins and we continue to celebrate it in our liturgies for fifty days. All of us at St. Leo the Great Parish wish you Feliz Pascua, Pasti Conziza, Happy Easter! We hope and pray that you will thoroughly enjoy and delight in the fifty days of celebrating Easter that conclude with the grand celebration of Pentecost. We pray that you will be blessed with new and abundant life of God's presence in your life, rejoicing as you live your faith, renewed by the promises of your baptism, singing Alleluia and practicing resurrection. Thank you for the hope you will live and bring to others by living more freely away from sin and death in our world. Celebrate the Lord's victory over death by loving unconditionally and helping raise others up over the weaknesses of the human condition. Show your family and the whole world that life, eternal life has the final say now and forever. As signs of Spring break out in abundance during this month and remind us that "unless a seed falls to the earth and dies it will not produce much fruit," join with all creation in praising and thanking God for the gift of resurrection and new life.

Thank you so much for your prayers and support for all of us here at St. Leo the Great. We have been the beneficiaries of the fruits of your Lenten prayer, fasting and works of charity. In so many ways, you have helped us experience the new life of the Lord's resurrection and you have shown us that life gets the final say for anyone who believes. Please know that as we praise God with Alleluias, music and dancing we are also thanking God for you and your goodness. May the Lord fill you with an abundance of Easter joy and blessings. Thank you for helping us build God's kingdom and for being God's church with us.

Before we celebrate Easter this month, we have the honor and privilege of celebrating Holy Week together. Beginning with Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday Night Vigil, we truly enter into the Lord's Passion. It is a celebration of the Paschal mystery where eternal life comes from death. Death is the vehicle through which we will live forever. "If we die with the Lord, we will rise with the Lord." God has destined all of us to share in Jesus' victory over sin and death. This is the most solemn prayer of the Church and I encourage everyone to check your church bulletins for the schedule of the liturgies for Holy Week and plan to participate in some, if not all. "There is truly no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

All of the sacraments embrace the paschal mystery in some way and help us encounter the Lord's resurrected presence. I want to tell you a true story that happened to me a long time ago. I was a part-time chaplain at Bethesda

North Hospital in Cincinnati and I was called to visit a patient who had asked for the Sacrament of the Sick. When I got to

her room, she was in bed, facing the window with her back to the door. I walked around to the side of the bed by the window so I could see her face and try to talk to her.

I immediately noticed that she was unresponsive and attached to many machines. She was making gurgling sounds. I was really tempted to leave the room and get back to my work at the parish. After all, she cannot participate and what good could come from me just reciting the prayers alone? I heard a strong voice inside me urge me to stay and say all of the prayers a loud. Then I remembered something that I had been taught: "Hearing is one of the last senses to stop working when someone is dying, so it is always good to talk to the person whether they can respond to you or not."

I prayed all of the prayers aloud and the lady showed no response, only gurgling. Then it came time to pray the Our Father. When I started to pray, she stopped gurgling and in a strong and very clear voice she prayed the Our Father with me. As soon as we finished praying the Our Father, she started gurgling again. I finished the ritual with tears in my eyes. I blessed her with these words: "May the Lord be with you to protect you. Stand behind you to give you strength. Look upon you with kindness and bless you with peace." I kissed my hand and touched her forehead. I told her that I with the Lord's church loved her very much. When I put my hand on the door knob to leave (Remember that her back would now be toward me.) the gurgling stopped again and in a clear, strong voice she said, "Father, I love you." I went running back to her bed and I said, "Thank you. I love you too!" Immediately, she started gurgling again. Two days later, she died.

"If we die with the Lord, we will rise with Him." Suffering and sickness do not have to end in death. We are redeemed. Eternal Life has the final say for all of us. It was such a blessing and a comfort to know that the Lord truly joins our sufferings to his sufferings and carries us or walks with us right into his kingdom. "Be not afraid. I am with you always!" A blessed Holy Week to all! Happy Easter everyone!

