

One of the great joys of ministry is not just doing things for children, but occasionally connecting with them about God in truly meaningful ways. I remember one time in my last parish when a family wanted me to come over and bless their newborn, which I was happy to do, but I also noticed their first child, a girl of about three, watching with some concern, perhaps anxious about being left out or overlooked, so I asked her to “help” me make the sign of the cross on her newborn sister’s forehead as I prayed, and I was touched at how her face showed that her concern was in that moment transformed into understanding and love.

Just last week, I was teaching chapel for our school here at Advent. Sitting right there, I asked the children if they knew what day was coming up, and many of them shouted, “Easter!” And even before I asked them what special things they were going to do today, the joy in their answer showed me that they understood that Easter was something really good. I asked them what they might do today, and many of them mentioned finding eggs, eating candy. I was surprised at how many mentioned the Easter bunny, but maybe I was just projecting how creepy I find it when adults dress up as that character. With a little prompting, they acknowledged that they would be spending time with family, having a nice dinner, dressing up, and going to church.

Then I asked if they knew why they would be celebrating in this way. A few brought up the Easter bunny again, but to my delight, a few mentioned Jesus, and even his resurrection. Sometimes children overlook important things. Sometimes they get excited about things adults hardly notice. Sometimes they hit the nail on the head. So we talked a bit about how much God loves us, and how God and love are stronger than mean people and death, and how living with love of God and neighbor is the best way to live, and how since Jesus rose from the dead, anyone can go to heaven now and we don’t have to be afraid of anything anymore.

Jesus loves children, but he doesn’t want them never to grow into the fullness of their capability. God’s will for all of us is life, not static preservation, and by God’s design, life for us entails growth. Children are such a joy; to God, we are all like children. Children can be perceptive, and sometimes unintentionally insightful, but they tend not to perceive deeper meanings because they have not yet been exposed to enough to be able to understand. If you don’t have enough knowledge to work with, you can’t put things together and perceive the richness of the intellectual and material world.

That’s reflected in Luke’s Easter story. The women who came to the tomb bearing spices, honored with the title of myrrh bearers, show profound love and commendable faith, far more faith than Jesus’s male followers, but even so, they had not put everything together. As laudable as their devotion was, the fact that they were coming to a place where Jesus had said he would not be, bearing embalming supplies for a body that was no longer susceptible to death, shows that they were a little behind the times. They were bringing a pre-resurrection understanding to a freshly post-resurrection world.

The witness of the angels in this story reminds us of God's nurturing love and commitment to our growth. They remind the myrrh bearers of what Jesus had already told them, although we should note, the word "Remember" does not have the same sense as it does in English. We think of remembering as simply recalling to mind, but in the original Greek, the word means, "bring to bear in the present, with power and deep insight, the meaning of past actions and words in God's plan of salvation."*

It might seem strange, or even disappointing, that Jesus does not appear in this crucial first moment of Luke's resurrection narrative. But in a sense, it doesn't matter, because in the subsequent stories where Jesus does physically appear, nobody recognizes him at first. In Luke's account, just seeing the risen Jesus doesn't do much; he looked like an ordinary man, though not like Jesus did during his natural life. He conversed, walked around, and ate like anyone else. Only by engaging with Jesus, both intellectually, in the explication of Scripture, and materially, by sharing a meal with him, do people perceive the new and eternal life of his resurrection, and recognize him as he truly is.

The Church continues this tradition, using everything at our disposal to reveal, point to, and connect humanity with Jesus, following his example as best we can. We use materials, ideas, technology. We use not just our minds, but our bodies and our senses in worship. For example, as part of our ongoing restoration of our worship and traditions, today we are restoring the use of Sanctus bells to express the particular joy of the Eucharist and express the supernatural grace God makes available there that our senses cannot perceive. Best of all, we use ourselves, the fullness of all God has given us, to express our faith in God's providence and our love of God and neighbor. We do this when we devote our time, presence, attention, money, and other resources to worship, ministry, outreach, and fellowship.

Although we cannot see and touch the risen Jesus in precisely the same way as those who engaged with him between his resurrection and his ascension, we can and do engage with him in worship, service, prayer, study, and the sacraments of the Church. Especially the Eucharist, where we do recall Jesus to mind, but much more importantly engage with him in a profoundly intimate way.

Even though the bread and wine look no more to us like Jesus than Jesus himself looked like Jesus to his followers who had not yet engaged with him, the consecrated elements of the Eucharist are just as much Jesus as he was in his risen body. And so when we receive the Eucharist, Jesus becomes a part of us, in his very body and blood, nourishing and transforming us so that we might grow in grace, grow, as St. Paul said, into the full stature of Christ. Or as St. Ignatius of Antioch said, the Eucharist is the "medicine of immortality."

That is why we receive the Eucharist every week, and sometimes even more often: because our spiritual growth is an ongoing process. God's work in us, and, through us, in the world, goes on until Christ comes again in glorious majesty at the end

of time. God knows our need for God, and God is ever faithful to us, and present with us in the way we need God the most.

We have a lot to celebrate today, not just what God has done, but also what God continues to do. By the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, God has connected with humanity and the whole of Creation in a way greater than we could ever fully understand. But nevertheless, the life of God begun in us in our baptism continues to grow. By God's grace, we go from being children to partners with Jesus, from alienated to reconciled, from fearful confusion to joyful understanding, from dying to anticipating everlasting life with hope and joy. Try to remember this glorious reality, not just in the sense of recollection, but in the full sense of bringing it to bear in the present, whenever you say, "Happy Easter."

*<http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/ceasdm.shtml>