**Easter 17 April 2022**

I start my homily with a question. “What brought you to church tonight/today? Top 2 answers: I’m here because it’s Easter, a very special holy day or #2 my mom made me (mom’s, often the great voice of Catholic guilt). Regardless of what led us here, have you ever wondered what our world might be like without Easter? Without Easter, our grocery stores wouldn't be filled with beautiful lilies or spiral sliced hams. We probably wouldn’t color hard boiled eggs or search for plastic ones in our yards. I imagine the revenues of candy manufacturers would suffer. But then again, instead of bunnies and peeps, maybe they'd be able to make up some of the lost sales with marshmallow leprechauns or chocolate groundhogs. And of course, there’d be a certain bunny out of a job. But beyond the secular impact, a world without Easter would be vastly different from the one we know today.

Think about it; with regard to worldwide historical influence, nothing compares to Easter. In fact, I would argue that Easter is everything. For without Easter, there wouldn’t even be a reason to celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Savior. Frankly, without Easter, I seriously doubt that most of us would even be aware of the Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. I concede that never knowing of Jesus sounds outlandish, for sure. But history has provided multiple alternatives to the one that we call Lord and most are far from household names.

Historian Harvey Cox, a 20th century theology professor at Harvard’s School of Divinity, reports that there were no less than 6 men claiming to be the Messiah during Jesus’ lifetime. Six men claiming to be either divinely appointed Kings or even the promised Son of God. Historian James Tabor points to 6 more supposed messiahs in the second half of the first century, three of which are mentioned in Acts of the Apostles. And false messiahs have continued to appear and consistently gather followers over the past 2000 years. In fact, I was surprised to learn that in the past 50 years alone, not less than 16 different religious leaders have claimed to be the promised one, the messiah and/or the Son of God. Of the 16, the only one that I was aware of was Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, better known as Moonies. All of these false messiahs preached a kingdom and all of them are now dead. No one follows a dead messiah! Eventually their followers scattered and their movements languished as well. And therein lies the significance of Easter. Our Messiah, Jesus the Christ, is risen and he LIVES.

Had it not been for the Easter miracle of Jesus’ resurrection, I imagine that like the followers of the false Messiahs, the Apostles and Jesus’ disciples may very well have scattered and faded into obscurity. But because the resurrected Jesus visited his followers after his death and lives on in each of us through his Holy Spirit, those first followers had the courage and felt the need to share the Good News and they established the apostolic Church as instituted by Jesus. Without a resurrected Jesus, our world would be missing more than 2 billion professed Christians spread across approximately 40,000 different Christian traditions, gathering in one of more than 3 million worldwide church buildings. At the core of all Christian faith is one singular, remarkable, unexpected and even un-hoped for event; the Resurrection.

As the result of the Resurrection, the event that we call Easter, the world is changed and so are we. Easter is the foundation of our faith and the source of our hope in Jesus, the true messiah and Savior. Out of his love for us, on Easter, Jesus returned to us and remains with us so that we might share in his eternal kingdom. Because of Easter, we know that no sin that we commit is beyond redemption and we know that because of Easter, Jesus has opened the gates of heaven to each of us. Because of Easter, each time we gather at the funeral of a loved one, we do so with the sure and certain knowledge that something far better than this world awaits the faithful.

So again, I ask: Why are we here? We are here because our Lord lives, he is risen and he is with us for all eternity.