

**“For they did not yet understand...that he HAD to rise from the dead.”
(Vigil: “Do NOT Be Afraid.”)**

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a college girl was flying on a plane from Chicago to Providence, Rhode Island. As she stared out the plane window, down at the green countryside below, her heart was heavy and tears were in her eyes.

She was a student at Loyola University and was returning home for the Easter holidays. Her first year at college was nearly over and it had been a disaster. She was convinced that life no longer had any real meaning for her. Her only ray of happiness lay in the fact that she'd soon see the ocean, which she loved dearly.

As the plane touched down on the runway at Providence, the girl wondered what kind of Easter vacation was possible ...given her... 'situation.'

Her grandmother met her at the gate, as planned. The two of them drove home in complete silence. As they pulled into the driveway, the girl's only thought was to get into her car and drive to the ocean.

It was well after midnight when the girl arrived at the beach. What happened next is best described in the girl's own words:

“I just sat there in the moonlight, watching the waves rolling up onto the beach. Slowly, my disastrous first year rolled before my eyes... day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month.

Then, all of a sudden, the whole experience ‘fell into place.’ It was OVER and PAST. I could forget about it forever; BUT... at the same time, I didn't want to forget it!

The next thing I knew, the sun was coming up in the east. As it did, I sensed my feelings starting to peak, just as a wave peaks before it breaks.

It was as if my mind, heart, body, and soul were drawing strength from the ocean. All my old goals and enthusiasm came rushing back, stronger than ever. I rose with the sun, got into my car, and headed home.”

After her Easter vacation, the girl returned to the university, picked up the broken pieces of her year, and fitted them back together again.

In the short span of an Easter vacation, that girl died and rose again. For the first time in her life, she understood the **practical meaning of Easter!**

‘In our practical, daily life, what does Easter mean?’ ...you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Easter means experiencing the power of Jesus changing a great tragedy in our lives into a glorious, new beginning.

For example, take the disciples of Jesus. Before the great tragedy of Good Friday, Jesus was the person who gave meaning to their lives.

The disciples had **pledged** their lives to Jesus.

They had put their **dreams** in Jesus.

They had pinned their **hopes** on Jesus.

BUT... there's that proverbial **BUT** in life.

Then came **Good Friday** ...all those **pledges**, all those **dreams**, all those **hopes**...got smashed into a million pieces!

With one terrible thrust of a soldier's spear, all those **pledges**, all those **hopes**, all those **dreams** ...died on the cross with Jesus.

With one terrible thrust of a soldier's spear ...their very lives died on the cross with Jesus.

When the sun went down on Good Friday, they, too, were buried in the tomb with Jesus. And, it was all over.

Then ...**IT** happened! The sun rose on Easter Sunday morning & Jesus rose with it & he appeared to his disciples. He was more radiant & more fully alive than they had ever seen him before. **At that moment**, in a **practical** way, **the power of Easter began to work** in the lives of the disciples. Their new insight would fully blossom on Pentecost. They'd be transformed from a band of despairing men into a brigade of daring missionaries. At the command of Jesus, in their daily lives, they would set out to carry the Good News of Easter to the four corners of the earth.

And everywhere they preached the Good News, the power of Easter began to work in the **daily lives** of people, just as it had in **their** lives.

Beautiful things began to happen: **despair** began to give way to **hope**; **darkness** began to give way to **light**; **hatred** began to give way to **love**; **sorrow** began to give way to **joy**.

In short, everywhere the disciples preached, the power of Easter began to work miracles in people's lives. And those miracles haven't stopped yet. They continue to happen in our time.

What is Easter? I'll tell you what Easter is:

Easter is a brokenhearted college girl wiping away her tears and starting over again!
Easter is a band of defeated disciples being transformed into an army of daring missionaries!
Easter is a world in darkness throwing off its chains of despair and walking in the light of hope!

And this brings me to **this** gathering in **this** church and within the sound of my voice **this** Easter vigil/morning.

What, **exactly**, does Easter invite us to do? I'll tell you:

It invites us to ...open our hearts to the risen Jesus and let him do for us what he did for his disciples and the people to whom they preached after the first Easter.
It invites us to let Jesus help us **love again**...after we've had our love rejected by someone.
It invites us to let Jesus help us **trust again**... after we've had our trust betrayed by someone.
It invites us to let Jesus help us **hope again**... after we've watched our hope flicker and die.
It invites us to let Jesus help us **wipe our tears, pick up the pieces, and start over again**... after some great tragedy.

Easter is the Good News that Jesus is risen **and** is in our midst. It's the Good News that, if we truly open our hearts to him, nothing can ever defeat us again— not **discouragement**, not **pain**, not **misfortune**, not... even... **death** itself!

This is what Easter is all about ...in a **practical** way.

This is what we celebrate as we now prepare to break bread together, at his table, on this great birthday of our Christian faith!

May the love of God the Father, the power of the Risen Christ, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, our Abba, bless you + now and forever. Amen.