

Easter 2020

My brothers and sisters,

As I am composing this letter, we are in the very beginning of Holy Week, the most sacred week of the Christian Faith. I know that it's Holy Week mostly because that is what our calendar tells us and this year, in 2020, Easter falls on [April 12th](#). The last time Easter fell on [April 12th](#) was in 1998, a time when the world was preparing itself to enter the 21st century, a new and yet undiscovered millennium. If we continue to move back in time, we will discover that Easter fell on [April 12th](#) back in 1936, a period of political and social upheaval in Europe when the entire globe was beginning to ponder the very real possibility of a second world war.

But that was yesterday. This is [today](#). And yes, it is Easter, the most sacred holiday of our Church. I can always identify Easter. The purple that once covered our altars for 40 days comes down and is replaced with white. Flowers of various kinds, often lilies, adorn our sanctuary. Easter baskets full of paska, sausage, coloured eggs, butter and horseradish and chocolate (sometimes spirits, at least in St. Francis) are lovingly prepared and brought to the church to be blessed. The smell of wine permeates the sacristy as the altar guild prepares for the First Mass of Easter. The Gloria and Alleluia return with gusto to our liturgy. Worshipers crowd into our tiny country churches and our magnificent cathedrals, often being forced to sit elbow to elbow and remarkably, extending even to the front pews. People, masses of people, believers, skeptics, the spiritually sensitive and those with hearts of stone, all come together, embracing our common humanity and finding in our collective community something more powerful than ourselves.

I would like to draw your attention to the conclusion of Mark's Easter Gospel, Mark being the first evangelist to have penned our sacred story. "So, they (the women) went out and fled from the tomb, for fear and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mk 16:8). And that my brothers and sisters, is how Mark ended his Gospel. In this earliest version of the Easter narrative we have quite a contrast to the Easter narrative that we have all come to love and appreciate. There are no throngs of people piling into churches, magnificently adorned altars or family gatherings to celebrate the glorious day. What we have in Mark are only fear...and silence! They (the women) left the tomb in fear.....and they told no one what had happened, two reactions to the resurrection which I have never really experienced before in all my past Easters. What I find most fascinating in this earliest Gospel is how these two very human reactions, fear and silence, were the very foundations upon which our entire faith was born.

I realize that for many of us, this Easter will not be the same. I will miss the hugs during the passing of the peace, the shouts of alleluia which are always extra-loud on Easter [Sunday](#), the children in their [Sunday](#) best running up and down the aisle, families taking up entire pews, and trying to stay on key for all of those "harder to sing" Easter hymns. I will miss the Good [Friday](#) tears, both the visible tears and those we secretly try to wipe away. I will miss the joy and laughter of Easter morning. And I will especially miss, for it is so much a part of my faith, the breaking of the bread, the sharing of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharistic meal, that moment of grace where all are received, and no one stands alone.

And so, it is Easter – Easter 2020 – an Easter that will be remembered for a very long time. As I compose this letter, I want to acknowledge the pain, loneliness and fear that many of us are experiencing. I particularly want to recognize those of you who are most vulnerable, the elders of our parish, those with compromised immune systems who are most at risk for contracting this virus. I know that this year many of you will need to spend Easter alone and without the company of your children, grandchildren and community of friends. In my own household, there will be no Easter egg hunt for my dearest ones, William, Clara, Olivia and Raymond. There will be no need to “extend the table” and as difficult as it was, Lorraine and I have already advised Lorraine’s mother that she will need to dine alone this year, that we love her too much to potentially expose her to Covid-19. Yes, this will be a difficult Easter, one of fear and uncertainty, one of solitude and isolation.

I am not quite sure how I will cope this year. Like you, I just want this to end. I do know one thing, however. The more I come to reflect upon Mark’s version of the resurrection, the more I come to recognize my own experience of the empty tomb. Maybe fear and silence, uncertainty and isolation, are not so far removed from the Easter story as I had once thought. Maybe as I come to embrace my own fears of this global pandemic, I will also come to recognize that fear and hope are part of the same story, that death and life are somehow connected. Maybe as I struggle with the silence and isolation imposed through this social distancing, I can somehow reconnect to my inner-self, the heart and soul of my being. Yes St. Mark, your account of the resurrection is a stark reminder that “fear” and “silence” and “empty tombs” will ultimately give birth to hope and renewal...and resurrection.

And so, my brothers and sisters, keep doing what you are doing. I know it’s hard. I don’t like it either and in all my weariness and despair I keep reminding myself why I’m doing it, that is because I love you all, and want you all to be safe. And finally, let me close with her Majesty the Queen’s closing message to the UK, the commonwealth and the world. “We will meet again,” she said. And we will. And we will celebrate the many lives saved. And we will mourn the many lives lost. And we will once again show the world the very best of what it means to be church.

And so, I wish you all a blessed and happy Easter! I love you all!

This letter comes with my warmest and personal wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Fr Wayne