

2020 Easter Sunday – P. Abbot John Braganza, OSB

Easter is the time for baking bread, fresh unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. It's the new bread baked in the oven of the divine nature we carry by our baptism. When a woman bakes bread she must use an oven. She must use something greater than herself to bake the bread. This is what we see in the Gospel. Mary comes to the tomb in the morning when it is still dark, a reflection of her own interior darkness. She tries to understand the death of Jesus from her own small human perspective. Only when Jesus calls her out of herself, "Do not touch me!" does she begin to bake Easter bread. Easter bread is baked in the fire of our relationship with the Father. The Risen Lord is the one who places us in this oven!

Have you heard of the story of Pierre de Keriolet (+1660) This last and only boy in a family of four, had neither love nor fear. He was rebellious, rowdy, and loved only games violence and sensual pleasure. As a student he would steal from his parents and from his fellows to satisfy his desires. At 22, he stole from his parents and when caught he ran away from home and headed to Constantinople to become a Muslim. He was attacked, however, by bandits in a German forest and in the face of danger, he made a promise to make a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Liesse, near Laon, France.

But having barely escaped with his life he ignored his promise. He indulged himself in debauchery and witchcraft. Later when his father died and left him a fortune, he became a Huguenot to blackmail his relatives to give him a larger share of the inheritance due to him in exchange for returning to the Catholic Church. One night he was deeply disturbed by a vision of hell and saw his place in hell if he continued to scorn divine justice. He tried the Carthusians

for some months as a postulant, **but when he fell into impurity he left and became worse than before.**

His conversion came when, out of curiosity, he attended an exorcism and one of the demons spoke to him: "What? This God you have scorned for so many years! Oh, wicked one! We thought we had you and could take you to hell after you made the vow to Notre Dame de Liesse and did not keep it." Shaken to the core, he asked the demon, "Can you tell me why I left the monastery?" **"God could not bear so impure man in such a holy house!"** (St. Joseph of Clairval Abbey, Letter of Jan 21, 2020, by Dom Barthélemy Marie, OSB)

Let us pick up the thread from the Easter Vigil yesterday: The disciple must struggle henceforth to go beyond the merely tangible, audible, visual, and emotional to a perception of faith that sees Christ behind every event and person encountered, behind each moment of time. **This is the kind of "good" inspired by the Holy Spirit that our risen life is about. This is when the Easter bread gets baked!**

The simple testimony of the Acts of the Apostles sums up the life of Jesus before his resurrection and the life of the Apostles and the Church after his resurrection! "God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil." (10:38) It can be our testimony that Jesus Christ is indeed risen and with us! We don't have to cure the sick or cast out devils but go about doing that good that is inspired by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. **It is the Holy Spirit that bakes our bread! He is given to us by the risen Christ.**

But it begins with our experience of being forgiven all our sins in his name. The same Holy Spirit who forgives our sins opens us up to

the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. He is present to us on our journey to God. God's love for each one personally is awakened by the resurrection. This love received again and again and awakens us to the knowledge that God is love. God is love in an absolute way, in a way that his goodness towards us never wavers. The knowledge and experience of this love empowers us to radiate this love to others. **To do this is the first kind of "good" thing we do. "The disciple's love for Jesus results from Jesus' love for him."**¹

Pierre was touched by grace after this encounter with the demon and publicly confessed his sins and received the sacrament of Confession. He began to break fresh bread! "On his return to Brittany he became as famous for his penitence as he had been for his debauchery." (Letter of Jan 21, 2020, by Dom Barthélémy Marie, OSB)

His new clothing looked different. He dressed like a pauper, dividing his time between prayer, study, meditation, and eating mainly bread and water. Religious and beggars were his only guests. He gave away his wealth in limitless charity and supported the city's hospitals and made a vow of poverty. Later he became a priest with great reluctance, **being tempted to pull back his hands from the Bishop at his ordination.**

"Seeing this poor priest walk by, wearing a worn cassock, face haggard, eyes lowered, rosary in hand, carrying neither bag nor walking stick, many remarked, astonished, "so this is the devil of Keriolet." (Letter of Jan 21, 2020, by Dom Barthélémy Marie, OSB)

Here we have an astonishing example of the power of the resurrection. He would say of the old leaven: "Possession of the body, though unpleasant, is not the worst thing; rather, the possession of souls by sin is the only truly horrible thing and the only thing we truly need to fear." Peter proclaims: "It is to him that all the prophets testify: that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name." (Acts 10:43) **To live a life without sin is our Easter gift and joy!**

When you bake bread, the smelly corruption of the yeast is transformed into appetizing bread. The joy of Easter is to preserve in ourselves this newly bread baked in the relationship with our heavenly Father. The smelly corruption of our sins is changed into sweet smelling bread. **Jesus begins our Easter journey by providing us with this new batch of bread, Himself in the Eucharist!**

How great is our joy in the Risen Lord who teaches us to bake the Easter Bread! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

¹ Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 335.