

“GOD’S EMPTY EGG”

Jeremy Forrester was born with a twisted body, a slow mind and a chronic terminal illness that had been slowly killing him all his young life. At the age of 12, Jeremy was only in second grade, in a class with 18 other students, at Saint Theresa’s Elementary School, seemingly unable to learn. Although there were times when he spoke clearly and distinctly, most of the time he would just squirm in his seat, drool and make grunting noises.

One day, in consultation with his parents, Jeremy’s teacher, Miss Doris Miller, told them that Jeremy really belonged in a special school. That it wasn’t fair to him to be with younger children, who don’t have learning problems.

Mrs. Forrester cried softly into a tissue while her husband spoke. “Miss Miller, there is no school of that kind nearby. It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of school. We know he really likes it here.”

After they left, she sat for a long time, pondering the situation, before she was brought to say a prayer. “Oh God, Please help me to be more patient with Jeremy.”

The following spring came and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Miss Miller told them the story of Jesus and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. “Now, I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life.

The next morning, nineteen children came to school and placed their eggs in a large wicker basket. When it was time to open the eggs, Miss Miller took the first egg and found a little flower inside. “Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life, especially when plants peek through the ground to tell us that spring is here.”

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly. “We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too.” On and on she went, each child identifying their egg, until she opened the last egg, Jeremy’s egg. She gasped because the egg was empty. Surely, she thought that he did not understand her instructions. Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside. Suddenly, Jeremy spoke up. “Miss Miller, aren’t you going to talk about my egg?” Flustered, Doris replied, “But Jeremy – your egg is empty!”

He looked into her eyes and said softly, “Yes, but Jesus’ tomb was empty too!” Stunned, she asked him “Do you know why the tomb was empty?” “Oh yes!” Jeremy exclaimed, “Jesus was killed and put in there. Then his Father raised him up!”

Doris sat at her desk and held back her tears, finally saved by the dismissal bell. Three months later, Jeremy’s illness caught up with him and he died. Those who paid their respects at the funeral home were surprised to see nineteen eggs on top of his casket, all of them empty.

This lovely story shows us that new life is all around us.

There is the new life for Jeremy, whose body limited him and made him a prisoner of his difference from other children his age. But, in passing, his soul was freed from the limitations of that human body. There was the new life that was transformed in Doris Miller, the school teacher, who learned that even God’s seemingly helpless children could move our hearts to a new position of love and understanding. There is new life in the presence of the young second graders, who learned that new life is around us but also within us, as they learned to appreciate the spirituality that Jeremy possessed and exhibited.

Today’s Gospel reading is from the 21st chapter in the Book of John. Our reading portrays the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples, after he had been raised from among the dead. This chapter was probably added to demonstrate once and for all the reality of the Resurrection; that the tomb

was empty and that the risen Christ had a real body, which still bore the marks of the nails and the spear thrust in his side.

The reality of the resurrection was not understood by many people at the time of Jesus, as evidenced by Mary Magdela's experience of the Risen Lord at the tomb; nor by the disciples, when she expressed her morning experience to them in the upper room. The reality of the resurrection started to sink in when Jesus first appeared before his disciples in the upper room, without the presence of Thomas. And this reality was further strengthened, by the physical witness to the resurrected body, when Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time in the upper room, in Thomas' presence.

So strong was his belief, after witnessing the physical evidence of the new body, that Thomas was brought to an instantaneous exclamation of **"My Lord and My God!"**

By the way, this exclamation should be shouted, within the depths of our soul, every time we silently witness the Risen Christ at Mass. Yes, this 21st chapter, from the Book of John, was added to demonstrate once and for all that there is life...after life.

Our second reading is from the Book of Revelation, which is a book about new things. There is the new name, which is our Christian rebirth in Christ; there is the new Jerusalem; there is the new hymn; there are the new heavens and the new earth; and there is the great promise that God makes all things new.

God, through Jesus Christ brought into life a quality which never existed before, a new joy, a new thrill, a new strength, and a new peace. And in today's Gospel reading, Jesus brought the old Peter, the weak, cowardly and unreliable person, to the new Peter, a person of publicly proclaimed love for Jesus, and the other Apostles, and for Jesus' flock, the brothers and sisters in the community. It was the new Peter that would proclaim "Love covers a multitude of sins." [1Pet 4:8].

And as our first reading tells us, Peter and his colleagues, these cowardly men who were no where in sight of the Crucifixion (except for John), became the new men of courage, by their obedience to the command to preach in the Temple; the new men of principle, which was that obedience to God must come first; the new men of function, they knew they were witnesses of Christ.

Since we believe in the Resurrection; since we believe there is new life...after this life; since we believe it make a difference in our lives; then we have the courage to openly profess our faith in the secular and somewhat hostile environment of our daily life; we respond to Jesus' question "Do you love me?" with Peter's response "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"; we practice the principle that God's will for us is an exercised priority; our thoughts and words and actions reflect our commitment to function as a witness to the Risen Lord.

And we witness to the Risen Lord by our response to Christ's new command "Feed my sheep!" We know that we love Jesus only by loving others. We acknowledge love as the greatest privilege in the world; even when love involves responsibility and sacrifice.

Then we are affirmed that our reward is to sing the new song. Throughout scriptures, the new song was always a song for new mercies of God. Our reward is to sing the noblest of songs for the new mercies of God in Jesus Christ.

We have joined the eternal choir of the heavenly body and every creature in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and in the universe. We give praise and exaltation to our Blessed God, for his power and strength, riches and glory, wisdom and honor; and thanks for our empty Easter eggs.