

The Last Laugh

I found it rather ironic how, this year, Ash Wednesday that began Lent, was also Valentine's Day. Also, Easter Sunday falls on April 1st that happens to be April Fool's Day. So, the more serious part of me conjures up more morbid thoughts of penance, self-denial, mortification. Yet, the more jovial side of me, conjures up more romantic and loving thoughts and challenges. In the same way, the more serious side of me, as it exits Holy Week, brings with it the leftover baggage of self-sacrifice. Yet, the more jovial side of me reminds me that Easter has the greatest laugh.

Given that I have almost endured and survived the disciplined cross of Lent, maybe it is time for me to lighten up and enjoy the new hope and possibilities that allow me to chuckle at the greatest Easter joke on All Fool's Day.

The irony is not confined to the two bookends – Valentine's Day or Ash Wednesday and April Fool's Day or Easter Sunday. It is also seen in the approach of the authorities at the time concerning Jesus' claim to be a king. He is covered with a purple royal coat of rags and crowned with a crown of thorns rather than a gilded crown – mocked as a puppet king in a foreign land.

The irony reminds me of Eugene O'Neill's dark and troublesome play, "Lazarus Laughed" in which everyone dies - Jesus dies; Lazarus' parents die; his sisters, Mary and Martha die; his wife dies; his children die; and yet, Lazarus laughs. The thread that run through the play reminds us why Lazarus laughs as he says, "Laugh! Laugh with me! Death is dead. Fear is no more! There is only life. There is only laughter!" The refrain continues, "Laugh! Laugh! There is only God! Life is His Laughter. We are His Laughter. Fear is no more! Death is dead!"

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus, travelled sadly as their hopes were dashed. The Stranger walks with them, listening to their sad story. Later on, the puzzle is complete and their hearts began to burn with joy and hope.

Later on, Peter began his sermon in a strange way. He said "These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" Peter imbued with the spirit of the Risen Christ, has to explain to the crowd that he is not intoxicated by drink but instead, is completely sober in the resurrection experience.

In the early Greek Orthodox tradition, we find a custom where, on the day after Easter, the clergy and laity would gather in the sanctuary to tell stories, jokes, and anecdotes. The reason given was that this was the most fitting way of celebrating the big joke that God had pulled on Satan in the resurrection.

The American playwright, Thornton Wilder, in his play, *Our Town* "says We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

Easter is a reminder that you can crucify life and it will resurrect. You can bury truth in the grave, but it will spring to life again. You can make a mockery of promises, but they will haunt you by coming true. You can nail truth to a cross, but it splinters into hope. You can roll a stone of finality to the grave but, it explodes in joy. You can come to the grave to anoint the dead, but you are surprised by a gardener.. You can bribe grave minders, but they will be blinded by the dawning of an eternal day. You can close the book of life, but you will be surprised that the last chapter has yet to be written.

— Robert Fulghum, in his book, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts On Common Things, reminds us to "believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death."

Easter reminds us that God had the last laugh, and, as the old proverb says, "he who laughs last, laughs best!"