

# KEEPING *the* EASTER SEASON ALIVE

**W**hen people talk about keeping the Christmas spirit alive, everyone knows what that means. But what about Easter? How would you explain what the “Easter spirit” is?

You might say that Easter Sunday instills in us a sense of awe, joy, hope, and renewal. Easter reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus overcame death. It assures us that our lives have meaning and purpose. It offers the promise of eternal life. And it sparks within us feelings of newness and revitalization.

But Easter Sunday is just one day. The Easter season lasts for fifty days—from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. At Mass

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**TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS**, a division of Bayard, Inc.;  
One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200, New London, CT 06320; (860) 437-3012  
or (800) 321-0411; [www.twentythirdpublications.com](http://www.twentythirdpublications.com)

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ISBN: 978-1-62785-590-7 • Cover photo: Serhii Yurkiw/Shutterstock • Printed in the U.S.A.

during those fifty days, we proclaim the word “alleluia,” which means “Praise the Lord.” In readings from the Acts of the Apostles during this time, we hear the story of how the disciples finally began to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. And as their story unfolds, we hear about miracles, dreams, conversions, imprisonments, dramatic escapes, new challenges, and the ways those challenges were resolved.

The Easter season reminds us of the power of the Holy Spirit. It invites us to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world today. It is not difficult to keep the Easter spirit alive during the fifty days of the Easter season. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could keep the Easter spirit alive throughout the entire year?

This little booklet offers you the opportunity to explore some of the key events that take place during the Easter season and discover creative ways to incorporate the Easter spirit into your everyday life. It includes Scripture passages, wisdom from Pope Francis, prayers, reflection questions that you can delve into on your own or as part of a discussion group, and ideas for action. It offers a journey into joy that will challenge you, inspire you, and sustain you—not just during the Easter season—but throughout the entire year.

# Experiencing *the* Resurrection

**W**e have heard the story of Jesus rising from the tomb, but do we really understand what resurrection means? Is it possible to experience resurrection in our own lives?

All four gospels provide an account of the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–14, Luke 24:1–44, John 20:1–29). While the details in each account differ slightly, the accounts agree on three key facts:

- The apostles were depressed and filled with fear after the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Mary Magdalene was at the tomb early in the morning on the day after the Sabbath – in John’s gospel by herself and in other accounts with one or more women.
- The stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty.

It was only after the risen Lord began appearing to different people that the followers of Jesus came to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The word “resurrection” comes from a Latin word meaning “to stand up again.” Jesus “stood up again” on Easter Sunday when he

emerged from the tomb. What seemed to be the end of Jesus' ministry turned out to be a new beginning. For the next forty days, Jesus appeared to his disciples in bodily form—bearing the marks of his crucifixion, teaching them, challenging them, consoling them, and sharing meals with them as proof that he had overcome death.

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope that, even in the darkest moments of our lives, there is a promise of something new on the horizon. The resurrection of Jesus gives us the confidence that no matter how boring, painful, or devastating things are, we can be renewed, restored, and recreated. We too will “stand up again.”

Think about the joy you felt when a child or grandchild was born. Or the beauty of a sunrise. Or a rainbow after a storm. Or the first flowers breaking through the soil in the spring. Or the taste of chocolate on Easter Sunday after you have given it up for Lent.

Maybe you have experienced a feeling of well-being after recovering from an illness. Or the relief of landing a new job after losing an old one. Maybe you have overcome some difficulty or resolved some dilemma. Or you knew in the depths of your soul that you would one day be reunited with a loved one who had died.

Whether it is something big or something small, these are all life-changing experiences. You might describe them as transforming or re-energizing or joy-filled. If you look at them from a spiritual perspective, you could call them “resurrection” experiences.

Pope Francis assures us, “If Christ has risen, it is possible to look with hope at every event of our existence, even the most difficult ones, those charged with anguish and uncertainty. This is the Easter message that we are called to proclaim with words, and above all through the witness of life.”

Once you begin to understand the real meaning of resurrection, your life will never be the same. Like the early followers of Jesus, you will find yourself suddenly alive with the belief that

God can make everything right. When you come to this realization, it will change you in such a way that you will not be able to keep this good news to yourself. You will have to stand up and tell other people about what you have experienced. And this is the true meaning of resurrection.

### **PRAYER**

*Lord, help me to persevere through difficulties with the hope that they will be followed by a resurrection experience. Open my eyes to moments of resurrection in my life. Instill in me the promise of new life that resurrection brings. Amen.*

### **QUESTIONS for REFLECTION**

1. When have you experienced a resurrection in your life?
2. How did your life change after you experienced a resurrection?
3. In what way does your faith in the resurrection of Jesus have an impact on your life?

### **IDEAS for ACTION**

- ✦ Read the accounts of the resurrection in the gospels (Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–14, Luke 24:1–44, John 20:1–29). Then close your eyes and let the words penetrate your soul. Reflect on what the Lord is trying to tell you in these passages.
- ✦ Share with a family member or friend what the resurrection of Jesus means for you.
- ✦ Stand up for something that is important in your life, your parish, or your community.