

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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HOLY WEEK

Not all Holy Weeks are created equal. In fact, some Holy Weeks aren't very holy at all, while others are inspiring and faith-molding. The rituals remain the same unless the new re-Latinated Missal messes it up big time. New, by the way, means reused medieval old, like a consignment store pair of 1970s pants that don't fit but you buy it anyway because it's a bargain.

In any case, try as they might, the Church cannot destroy the basic message of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can argue, protest, impugn motives, diagnose personalities, rant and rave about how the rituals are conducted and who conducts them but in the end we must face our belief in the death and resurrection of the Lord. And that's where the rubber meets the road.

Here's the deal: we chat about important but not necessarily essential stuff. I do it in this column all the time. I don't want to minimize the value of those chats; I believe this kind of casual, frank communication is important.

But we don't chat about the death and resurrection of Jesus. At least, I, and the groups I hang with, don't talk about this core belief most of us presumably share. To make matters worse, we are skeptical and suspicious about Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals who are more comfortable chatting about Jesus, his death and resurrection.

In our small faith group and our Sunday morning Dialogue with the Word gathering, we discuss our beliefs but that is not really chatting. We listen to homilies about it but when was the last time you spoke openly about the death and resurrection (D&R) of Jesus at home, work, on the phone, or informally with friends? Talking about priests, Bishops, Popes, the latest Church related sex scandal, Lenten fish fries, or women's ordination doesn't count. Do you chat about the D&R of Jesus? I don't.

Why not? His death and resurrection is the core of the matter. Maybe it is so core that we are afraid of it. Talking about it casually may trivialize it. Or, maybe we don't chat about it because we're not sure we really believe it, and we don't want to reveal our insecurity about so central a question. Or, perhaps we don't want to be labeled a fundamentalist. Or, maybe we figure the D&R of Jesus is best left to the theologians and hierarchs who specialize in these kinds of things. Or,

perhaps we figure it is more beneficial to focus on virtues and techniques to becoming better, more loving people. The net result is that this central tenet of our faith gets little attention in our daily lives and more casual conversations.

Am I right, or is this just me?

I have to be careful here. I don't want to homilize, not that I am opposed to homilies, either listening or giving, but not in this column. Here, we chat. But that's just the point, isn't it? How do you chat about the D&R of Jesus?

Before we can talk about it naturally, comfortably, and without a genuflection in our voice, we have to check our level of belief.

Do you really believe that Jesus rose from the dead? If no, that might be the basis of your reluctance to talk about it. If yes, it may be just a matter of practice.

So, practice. Say it out loud. Jesus rose from the dead. Say it over again, a little louder and more convincingly. Say it privately at first. Say it to a mirror with no one around. Say it out loud, in the bathroom at work when no one is there. Say it to yourself. Often. You don't have to tell anyone yet, just say it.

Once that is comfortable, then say it to someone else – family, friend. Go slowly. Say it until you are comfortable hearing yourself say it. Say it until your faith in it is reinforced. Repeat it. Listen for it in the prayers at Mass.

While you say it, eventually think about it in greater depth. Think about it not so much as a proof of Jesus' divinity but as a process of redemption. It is the flow of life and death – and life again. It is the pattern of nature. It is the path through suffering and into a greater life.

Say it until you can chat about it with anyone, and mean it. That is a truly Holy Week.