

HUMILITY RISES UP

EASTER SUNDAY

CYCLE C

Acts 10:34; 37–43

1 Corinthians 5:6–8

John 20:1–9

GATHERING

(The focal point of the room includes a lily or other spring plant, a lighted candle and a plate holding two matzos. Handel's "Halleluia") chorus plays as members arrive.)

Last week we lived some of the holiest days of the Christian year. But, unlike so many of our modern celebrations, Easter does not conclude with the passing of Easter Sunday night. Easter but begins this day. We have entered a *season* of the Christian year; a season of our lives; a season of wonder and hope.

How did your re–living of Christ's passion, death and resurrection affect your outlook and actions during Holy Week?

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Rejoice and be glad for Christ is risen, Alleluia!

All: Rejoice and be glad for Christ is risen, Alleluia!

Leader: O Risen One, you became flesh that we might draw nearer to God.



All: Rejoice and be glad for Christ is risen, Alleluia!

Leader: O Risen One, you embraced the cross that we might not suffer alone.

All: Rejoice and be glad for Christ is risen, Alleluia!

Leader: O Risen One, you are life eternal and we have found hope.

All: Rejoice and be glad for Christ is risen, Alleluia!

Focus Question

How would you describe the taste, feel, appearance, smell of unleavened bread?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

1 Corinthians 56–8

John 20:1–9

COMMENTARY

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you,
because by your holy cross, you have redeemed
the world.

These words have echoed through Lent and Holy Week and now again through the Easter season. Think of how odd these words must sound to many people, maybe even to ourselves when we stop and think about them.

The cross of Christ is an ironic symbol. It is the instrument by which the Lord's body was tortured and killed. But it is also the instrument by which humanity was given the hope of life eternal and glorious transformation. Pain and death cost us so much; yet it is in these struggles that we also find the fullness of life.

While we rejoice during these fifty days of Easter, we simultaneously find ourselves in the world with all its sorrows as well as triumphs. Hopefully, the holiest days of the year have strengthened us and given us a critical opportunity to reflect on life and death through the person of Christ Jesus. Paul's words to the Church at Corinth are directed to this *double edged* nature of Christian life. He uses the symbol of yeast – leaven – to focus our attention.

It might seem surprising that the Church chose this reading for Easter Sunday. Paul is urging these early Christians at Corinth to become "unleavened loaves". Somehow, unleavened loaves don't seem to fit during a time of great rejoicing.

What is an unleavened loaf like? It's not particularly attractive. It's not very tasty. You have to work at eating it; it doesn't melt in your mouth like a good leavened loaf is apt to do. It's highly unlikely that we'd ever consider serving an unleavened loaf at our holiday tables!

On the other hand, an unleavened loaf is more enduring. It's simpler. It's humble.

Recall the Hebrew passover experience. Fleeing slavery in Egypt, they were making a fresh start and that was a humbling experience. The bread for their journey was unleavened and it reflected their situation. They had to rely on God alone; God was the only leaven they needed to rise above the peril. Bringing God's saving activity to fulfillment, Jesus *humbled himself* in his passage from death to life. Paul reminds us that we cannot rise up if we are weighed down by selfishness, materialism and excess. We can become too "puffed up" with things of earth and we are challenged in this season to embrace humility as we rejoice heartily in the hope of life eternal.

As we ponder the gospel, we can liken the risen Christ to the leaven which gives new hope to his deflated disciples. Mary Magdalene's life had been touched by great pain; the disciple whom Jesus loved was a grieving friend; and Peter's oft-remembered denial of his relationship with Jesus carried great guilt. The *dough* of their lives was humble and they needed the leaven of him who would raise them up.

The process of our living and dying has many facets. Some moments are full of clarity while others are murky and confused. Yet, for the follower of Christ, all these moments of pain and joy converge in one glorious light-point which shines forever and beckons us forward to the glory of Christ who is the Risen One!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. How have you been "raised up" by the leaven of Christ this Easter?
2. In what ways do you feel too "puffed up" by the things of this earth?
3. What difference does the good news of Christ's resurrection make in your life?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

1. In the light of Christ's resurrection, share the joy of a loving surprise with someone. Send a note, make a phone call or give a sign of support where none is expected this week.
2. Pope Paul VI called us to live simply so that others might simply live. Carefully consider your purchases this week. Are these items those which you really need or mostly things you simply want?
3. Consider your feelings toward those who are marginalized in our society. Contact a person who works with those whom you most fear or misunderstand. Ask that individual to speak to your Small Christian Community about the service he or she provides.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The session culminates with the community singing a familiar "Alleluia" several times and closes with the sharing of some champagne or other festive beverage.)

Special Note: Members are asked to bring a New Testament bible with them to next week's session.