Columns
Spirituality



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On April 21, Pope Francis experienced the Easter joy of resurrection.

In his Easter message he wrote:

> Today at last, the singing of the "alleluia" is heard passing from mouth to mouth, from heart to heart, and this makes the people of God throughout the world shed tears of joy. … Jesus is not in the tomb, he is alive! Love has triumphed over hatred, light over darkness and truth over falsehood. Forgiveness has triumphed over revenge. … That is why, today, we can joyfully cry out: "Christ, my hope, has risen!"

In gratitude for Francis' life and leadership let us recommit to become who we are meant to be and embrace the new life that is ours this spring. Alleluia!

Growing up in Chicago, the coming of spring was always an iffy time. Snow cancels a planned event. Major storms flood the streets. Winter coats stand alert next to light weight jackets. The Windy City earns its name on a yearly basis. But there was always one thing that told us spring was here: the coming of the robin.

Seeing the robin woke us up to start looking around — to see the trees begin to bud and the forsythia brighten everything with brilliant yellow. There is even a song about it: "When the red, red, robin comes bob, bob, bobbin' along! Along, there'll be no more sobbing when we start hearing his old sweet sound, wake up, wake up you sleepy head."

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Wake up! Wake up! Wake up to the belief that transformation continually happens — bringing forth new life from that which has died. It is the paschal mystery embodied in creation. It is no wonder the church in our northern hemisphere placed the liturgical feast of Easter in spring.

The weeks of Lent invite us to join in Jesus' public ministry. We remember how he taught in parables and spoke in metaphors that threw those in power off balance. He often answered questions with a question — when asked, "Who are you?" Jesus would say, "Who do you say that I am?" — or with a paradoxical response — "Render

to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

We follow Jesus to the hillside and hear the beatitudes preached. We witness miracles that tell us there is enough. Abundance is everywhere, if you can only awaken to it.

Jesus' followers wanted to record how he healed the sick, befriended women, welcomed tax collectors, ate with those considered sinners, brought those thought dead back to life and loved his Abba God so much.

Jesus was awake to nature and learned from the birds of the air, the mustard seeds, the sheep, the lilies of the field, the importance of yeast and wine.



Pope Francis greets the crowd during his Easter message and blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) delivered from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 17, 2022. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Those who followed Jesus resonated with what they were seeing, what they were witnessing. Here was someone with whom they could connect and be inspired. Here was someone who knew about fishing, but then, with a turn of phrase, challenged them to be fishers of all people.

Then it seemed that fullness of life — the springtime of beauty and abundance — began to shift. People in power felt threatened. They needed to stop this person and his message.

The last days of Holy Week take us into the midst of betrayal, torture and death by crucifixion. Yet even that is framed within a last supper in which the washing of feet, the sharing of a meal and drinking of wine awakens an intimacy among those gathered. Jesus tells them that they are all one — even as he and his Abba God are one — and that they will come and dwell within them. They are simply to love one another as Jesus has loved them.

Jesus was waking them up to who they really are. "You will do even greater things than Abba-God and I." Fullness of life was being given to them. And yet, as it often happens, that glimpse of new life is overshadowed by doubt and fear as Jesus is arrested, tortured and put to death.

It seemed that only Mary, his mother, Mary's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary of Magdala and John stayed as Jesus drew his last breath. The women planned to anoint his body the next day, but only found an empty tomb. Fear? Grief? Death is final, yes? Hope — didn't he say he was going to come back? Thoughts and emotions probably overcame them.

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Then, through various encounters — an intimate friend, the disciples and believers on a journey — the inexplicable energy of Jesus' presence awakened in them the possibility that from death can come new life.

Centuries have passed and millions tell this story. However, few really believe it. It is difficult to believe that someone could love so fiercely, defend the dignity of each person so completely, learn from nature so wisely, and believe that is what Abba God desires of us all.

And yet every liturgical year, just like every spring season, the message of new life from death is proclaimed. Take some contemplative time to wake up and see with new eyes the hope that is ours as we become who we really are meant to be.

Jesus is risen. And the red, red, robin awakens us to spring. Alleluia!