

EASTER SUNDAY, Apr. 21, 2019, Year C

- Many of us had another “9/11” moment this past Monday. Suddenly, we learned that the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris was *on fire!* Rushing to our screens, we saw the flames rising up from its roof. A *searing* grief hit many of us, especially when we saw that beautiful spire fall and crash into the body of the building. *But why? ... Why would we feel pain and grief when a building is damaged or destroyed?* I wondered about this question again this morning, when hearing about the church bombings in Sri Lanka.. It is worth pondering because *the question, and its several answers, have much to teach us.*
- To help us *notice* this, let’s *name* what our own church building has in common with Notre Dame, as different as the two may be. *Both that medieval cathedral, and this modern-era church, are built upon a cross-shaped floor plan.* (*indicate*) Some contemporary faith communities are moving away from this ancient pattern ~ and from the insight that *we have a real and felt connection with the places where we worship*, and not only with the people with whom we pray. For, as sacramental people, it is through the *tangible* that we connect with the *intangible*.
- We know that in Baptism we become part of the crucified and risen Body of Christ. This is especially evident when a Baptism occurs on a great feast like this, with a church full of *his members*. Yet, *the moment is all the more meaningful when the building in which we are baptized reflects the crucified Body of Christ.* We are grafted into the Body of Christ as we are baptized into his death and resurrection. And this happens in a sacramental rite that calls us *to live a cross-shaped life.*
- And so, *every cruciform-shaped church should therefore remind us of Good Friday and of Easter* ~ of *both* our Lord’s *Cross* and his *Resurrection.* *Our churches are ‘body-shaped,’* because *the Church itself* is a crucified and risen *‘Body.’* Therefore, like many other medieval cathedrals, *Notre Dame in*

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Paris is so much more than a building. It is first **an offering of great love** for our Lord as well as for his physical, earthly mother.¹ **As an embodiment of faith and love, Notre Dame like our own parish is a tangible expression of the Body of Christ, in its many forms.** We are therefore *embraced* by the Body of Christ in Baptism, *in several mystically wonderful ways.* Especially when **Christ embraces us in Baptism through his Body, the Church, in a building shaped like his crucified body.**

- So, let's set this spiritual awareness in a wider context. We can connect it with some familiar and pivotal biblical stories, within **the wider sweep of Salvation History.** Here, I offer you *a simple phrase* with which to help identify and to remember *the heart of the mystery of our redemption.* **"Through the waters of death into a new covenant life with God."** This mystical awareness is wonderfully expressed in Peter Koenig's beautiful painting, **Christ as the Second Moses**, along with its side-panels, copies of which I have put in your worship bulletin. **Not only is it a painting about Christ, his Cross and Resurrection; it is also a painting about us.** For through the waters of *his death, we join him* in his Risen covenant life in God.²
- Given the colors at the top and bottom of the main panel, the painting is also called **the Rainbow Resurrection.** Though we associate these colors with *Easter*, we should stop to think about **what in Scripture a rainbow first represented.** In the Genesis series of stories,³ most of the life on earth was destroyed and lost in the flood, both *people and animals, as well as plants and trees.* **Noah and his family, and all the animals on the ark, traveled through the waters of death into a new covenant life with God.** That death, however *horrible, was not God's last word.* Death never is! For God's covenant people, **God's Word is a word of promise, a word of life.**
- Next, we should think of Israel, **escaping the Egyptians through the waters of death at the Red Sea.**⁴ With its evocative side panels, this great moment

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in Salvation History is powerfully captured in Koenig's painting. Israel's journey through the waters of death brought them to Mt. Sinai, and *to their great new Covenant with God*. This covenant was enacted when blood was sprinkled upon the altar of God, and also upon God's people.⁵

- *We discern the next great moment in Salvation History when Joshua and God's people crossed the Jordan with dry feet into the Promised Land.⁶ This water crossing echoed and recalled our spiritual ancestors' prior journeys through the waters of death into a renewed covenant relation with God. Israel's renewed covenant with God, within the Promised Land, signaled their desire to be faithful to God, no matter what. This is the same promise that we make to God today, as we renew our baptismal vows.*
- *And yet, perhaps the next most significant event embodying this pattern was the practice of John the Baptizer in the same river Jordan, centuries later.⁷ Many of those who came out to John were Jews by birth. To them, Baptism was what gentile converts did, not Jews! And so, for them to submit to, and receive, John's Baptism, was a holy act of living into the sacred covenants between God and their ancestors. Yet it would also have involved an immersion into the waters of death ~ death to old ways and old ideas, and sometimes death to prior social and family relations. Baptism by John in the Jordan represented their path into a renewed covenant life with God.*
- *Jesus' own acceptance of Baptism at the hands of his cousin, John, was not about his own, personal need. Jesus chose to live into this moment out of his deep identification with everyone who would become a member of his world-family. Through Jesus' acceptance of John's ministry, Jordan waters once again became symbolic of going through the waters of death to sin, and receipt of a renewed or new covenant life with God.*

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- And so, *when we are baptized into Christ, we live into all of these stories. For all of them are our stories. In Baptism, we, too, cross through the waters of death into a new covenant life with God.* This is why it is God's will, expressed by Jesus, that we all become baptized. Our renewal of our baptismal promises today represents the same pattern that we find in each of these stories. For we renounce the death brought about by evil and sin, and we renew *our commitment to live into the reality of our risen covenant life with God.*
- This helps us see how *Koenig's Christ as the Second Moses* is not only a *painting about Jesus* and his saving work; *it is also a painting about us*. For we are represented in the painting, as well. *Do you see those who are depicted standing in the purple shadows, behind the 'Christ' figure.* They are Adam and Eve, and all their offspring, *including us*. We are people who live and walk in darkness *until we meet the Resurrection Light*. He is the true Light that comes into the world to enlighten everyone. We meet his true light here this morning, in Jesus' resurrection. *Through him, we meet his light in the sacrament of the Eucharist. And today, we see his resurrection light in each others' faces!*
- Alleluia. Christ is Risen. *The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.*



Peter Koenig, *Christ as the Second Moses*

(also known as *The Rainbow Resurrection*)

(with accompanying side-panels)



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The readings appointed for this day are:

- Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25
- Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
- 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43
- John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1-12

NOTES

¹ The cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, like its sister cathedral Notre Dame de Chartres and so many other cathedrals, is dedicated to the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

² Peter Koenig writes this about the painting featured here: It is 'a picture of my "Second Moses" (one who talks with Yhwh like Moses), also called the "Rainbow resurrection". We put these up at Easter. It represents the THREE COVENANTS. The covenant of Noah, Moses and Christ, [as well as] the Harrowing of Hell.'

³ See Genesis 6 - 9.

⁴ See Exodus 12 & 14.

⁵ See Exodus 24.

⁶ See Joshua 3, in context.

⁷ Recorded in varying forms in all four Gospels.