

**PRAY** Loving God, today we celebrate Easter, the eighth day of creation. Help us live Easter each day, finding the holy within and around us, in each other and all that is. Let us live each day expecting you to rise within us. Amen.

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

**First an atheist, then an agnostic, now a Christian, Emily Anderson was baptized in the Catholic Christian community at Easter.**

"I was pretty much an atheist when I was growing up," Emily explains. "I didn't believe in God. My grandparents on my mom's side are Catholic; on my dad's side they are Lutheran. My parents raised me in a Unitarian Universalist fellowship to be neutral.

"I remember telling my mom in 9th grade that I didn't believe in God on the cross. She wasn't happy with me. But because I was raised in such an open way, no one ever told me Jesus was someone I should believe in. I was raised to believe what I wanted to."

In college Emily became an agnostic. She wanted to believe but has a scientific mind. "I'm a RN, a

Easter/2nd Sunday of Easter



April 9/April 16, 2023 Vol. 35 No. 26

# SPiRIT



## Finding Faith & Community

registered nurse," says Emily. "I like to know and understand what I believe."

Then two years ago Emily volunteered as a nurse for five weeks at an AIDS hospice in Guatemala. Her favorite client changed Emily's life. Ivan was 23 and in the end stage of AIDS.

"My first week other nurses told me to say my goodbye to Ivan because he wouldn't survive a second week," Emily remembers. "But he lived until the day after I left. He was okay with his death because he was going to a better place.

"Ivan was a very strong Catholic. He told me that we can't have proof for what we believe. Proof comes only in the future. Now in our lives, we just need the faith that something else is there.

"Ivan inspired me because it was so amazing to see the light in his eyes

when he talked about his faith and his acceptance of dying. I asked him if he was angry that he contracted HIV/AIDS. He wasn't upset or angry at God; he was very accepting and he lived life to the fullest until it was his time to go.

"Because I sat with him every day for two hours, gave him massages, and took him for rides to get chips and pop, we got very close. I saw that stimulating the human spirit keeps a person fighting to stay alive. He was giving up before I came and died in peace once I left.

"I was very glad that he didn't pass when I was there. My hospice had six adults at the end stage and 47 children at various stages of HIV/AIDS, some very sick and some still healthy. I had such anger. I reasoned there can't be a God because why would a God create this disease.





"I talked to Ivan about this. He said, 'Who are we to judge what a good life is or a long life is? An 80 year old might think that he hasn't lived, but a 13 year old dying of cancer might think that she lived a great life.'"

**A**t Christmas Emily returned to Guatemala to visit her boyfriend. In celebrating Christmas with his family, she experienced the real meaning of the feast instead of the commercialism that surrounds Christmas in the U.S.

"Families build a nativity scene in their homes that takes up almost an entire wall," Emily describes. "On Christmas Eve the whole family gets together and eats a lot. At midnight everybody stands around the nativity scene. The family lights incense and the elder, who in my boyfriend's family is his grandmother, says a prayer and talks about what Christmas means.



"I experienced the purity of Christmas rather than the gifts," Emily says. "My boyfriend's family asked me why in the United States we center Christmas around giving gifts instead of spending time with your family and going to church. I couldn't answer.

"Later the family took part in ceremonies honoring Mary. The people of the whole town came together for a procession, carrying a statue of Mary. I could feel the community of the people and the church. The church is really the center of everything. I experienced a peaceful feeling that stimulated me to want to become Catholic. I saw what faith really is."

Back in the states Emily searched online for a parish community. She found a parish named St. Joan of Arc. "People sang joyfully and accepted me. I felt the Lord's presence and the same feeling of community that I experienced in Guatemala. Everyone at St. Joan's is very welcoming and says, 'You can sit by me' or 'Come, join us.'"

Emily signed up for the parish RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) group to prepare for baptism. "Twelve of us prepared for baptism or confirmation together," Emily says. "Six of us had been baptized and six, including me, had not. Our RCIA group was a little family within the church.

"I am closest to my sponsor who is a very activist person. My sponsor is a social worker who does work in Africa and Guatemala and with AIDS. We have gotten involved in AIDS work together."

Emily likes learning the scriptures and gospels after growing up without ever reading the bible. "It is powerful to hear the stories and learn from the gospel," Emily reports. "We ask questions in our group that relate to our real lives. We talked about how to forgive ourselves

and how to forgive others.

"Most of us pretend to forgive somebody or we say we forgive ourselves, but we really don't. It was nice to see Jesus call people to change. None of us is free of sin. That hit home. We can't judge somebody else if we do the same.

"I learned from everyone in the group. Being so young, I have a different perspective than those in their 40s or 50s. I just turned 22."

Emily feels stimulated going to church each week. "I'm loving meeting new people," she says. "Getting baptized means finally coming out and saying that I believe in Jesus Christ. He died for my sins. At baptism I am forgiven of my sins. I will be able to live an eternal life in heaven.

"Baptism means putting myself out there with my beliefs, which is scary and something I've never done. It was calming to go through the steps toward baptism with the entire congregation. I felt intimidated at first but the support I received makes it all worth it."

**E**mily appreciates having found a community of people who practice what they preach. "I have found a congregation that acts, whether it be volunteering or standing up for a cause," says Emily. "People are actually living out the gospel instead of just listening to it every week."

Emily's grandparents and parents came to her baptism. "My mom was concerned if I was joining the Catholic Church for the right reasons," said Emily. "I hadn't talked to her about religion since I told her I was an atheist. My family is happy I have a community."

**QUESTIONS** 1 How does experiencing the faith of people in Guatemala change Emily? 2 How is Emily's journey to faith like your own? 3 Who has most influenced your faith? Whose faith in Jesus have you most influenced? 4 What makes the beloved disciple believe? 5 What brings the community of disciples to believe Jesus is risen? 6 What brings Thomas to believe?

# SUNDAY GOSPEL

Easter

## Jesus gives his peace and his spirit.

**NARRATOR 1:** Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away, so she ran off to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple (the one Jesus loved).

**MARY MAGDALENE:** The Lord has been taken from the tomb! We don't know where they have put him.

**NARRATOR 2:** Peter and the other disciple started toward the tomb. They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

**NARRATOR 1:** He did not enter but bent down to peer in, and saw the wrappings lying on the ground. Simon Peter came along behind him and entered the tomb.

**NARRATOR 2:** He observed the wrappings on the ground and saw the piece of cloth which had covered the head not lying by the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

**NARRATOR 1:** Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed. Remember, as yet they did not understand the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

**NARRATOR 2:** Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look inside and saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet.

**ANGEL:** Woman, why are you weeping?

**MARY MAGDALENE:** They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

**NARRATOR 1:** She turned and saw Jesus standing there but did not know it was he.

**JESUS:** Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?

**MARY MAGDALENE:** Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

**JESUS:** Mary!

**MARY MAGDALENE:** Teacher!

**JESUS:** Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

**NARRATOR 2:** Mary went and announced to the disciples.

**MARY MAGDALENE:** I have seen the Lord.

### 2nd Sunday of Easter

**NARRATOR 1:** On the evening of the first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them.

**JESUS:** Peace be with you.

**NARRATOR 2:** He showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced.

**JESUS:** Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

**NARRATOR 1:** Then Jesus breathed on them.

**JESUS:** Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.

**NARRATOR 2:** It happened that one of the twelve, Thomas (the name means twin), was absent when Jesus came.

**OTHER DISCIPLES:** We have seen the Lord!

**THOMAS:** I'll never believe it without probing the nail-prints in his hands, without putting my finger in the nail-marks and my hand into his side.

**NARRATOR 1:** A week later, the disciples were once more in the room, and this time Thomas was there with them. Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood before them.

**JESUS:** Peace be with you. Thomas, take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!

**THOMAS:** My Lord and my God!

**JESUS:** You became a believer because you saw me. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.

**NARRATOR 2:** Jesus performed many other signs as well—signs not recorded here—in the presence of his disciples. But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name.

John 20.1-31



Jesus and Mary Magdalene,  
Ely Cathedral, Great Britain.

# The Church continues Jesus' mission.

**W**ith his death, Jesus' mission and ministry on earth end. With his resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit, the mission and ministry of his disciples begin. The Church begins.

The Church today is a public assembly, a gathering of baptized believers. During his lifetime Jesus gathered a company of disciples, men and women who followed him in Galilee and came with him to Jerusalem.

On the first Easter Sunday evening, these men and women gathered together but not in public. They locked their doors out of fear for their lives. They had run for their lives when Jesus was arrested. Peter had denied he even knew Jesus. News that God has raised Jesus up had only confused them.

Jesus appears to this fearful and confused gathering of his followers. "Peace" is his greeting. He blames no one for running away or failing to believe. Instead he calls them to continue his mission. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then Jesus breathes his Spirit upon these disciples and

sends them to preach, heal, forgive, and free people from evil.

**I**n our first readings during the Easter season, we read from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's story of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. These Christians go public on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The Spirit comes upon the whole group gathering in prayer and sets their tongues afire with preaching. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church.

On this day Peter proclaims to thousands of pilgrims in Jerusalem that God has raised up Jesus from the dead, that he is the messiah and God's Son. Three thousand people believe and are baptized. These believers form a community, as described in Sunday's first reading.

The new believers continued steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in community life, the breaking of bread, and prayers. They sold their property and goods, and distributed everything on the basis of each one's need. Every day they went to the temple area together, broke bread at home, and shared their goods in common with glad and generous hearts, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2.42-47

**T**hese first Christians not only break bread as Jesus asked but they share meals, property, and prayer. Although through history not all Christians have shared their property like this, still breaking bread together as Jesus asked has always impelled Christians to make sure all have enough to eat and live. Welcoming people to Jesus' table calls believers to feed one another and treat one another as equals.

The Church is a public assembly of believers, a community that continues Jesus' mission, breaks bread, and shares life and prayer. In writing to the church he founds, Paul compares Christian communities to the human body. In the body of Christ, Jesus is the head; all who believe are members of the body. To be a believer in Jesus is to live in him as one. No part of the body is separable from the whole.

**Charity**

Who needs your feet to bring them a visitor or your arm to build?



**The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit....If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.**

1 Corinthians 12.12-13,26

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1** What image of the Church best describes the life you share with other believers in your parish? Body of Christ, people of God, flock of sheep, temple of the Holy Spirit?
- 2** How can you as teens continue the mission of Jesus in your parish or area?
- 3** Who needs your hands to heal or mouth to teach?
- 4** Who needs your support to free their spirit or your word of forgiveness?