

"Confidence in Christ"

1 John 5:9-15

May 20, 2012

7th Sunday of Easter

This week, we reach the end of a long period of celebration – the season of Easter. While the world likely stopped celebrating Easter sometime on the afternoon of Sunday, April 8th, the Church celebrates Easter for 50 days. Why the extended celebration? I mean, Easter is a good thing and all, but isn't enough enough?

There are many reasons people celebrate Easter. But can any of these reasons sustain such a long celebration? For many, Easter is just the celebration of the beginning of spring. That's a nice thing, but hardly worth more than a passing notice. Many celebrate Easter because it's a tradition: the Easter bunny, Easter candy, Easter dinner, and, at one time, new Easter clothes. Again, these are all nice things but not worth much more than a day's celebration.

Then there's the main message which the Church proclaims on Easter: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Can this prolong a celebration for 50 days? The outside world might see this Easter story as being nice – a happy ending to a sad story. "Good for Jesus!" they will say. "He suffered an unfair and painful death but rises from death to life again. Good for Him!" Happy story, but is it true? Probably many take it to be a heartwarming legend or an inspirational myth to teach us about new life or overcoming the odds. That might be heartwarming and inspirational, but one would hardly need 50 days to celebrate it.

But our prolonged celebration of Easter has nothing to do with spring time, traditions, or legends. It has everything to do with what Jesus has given us because of the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection from the grave and His return to life on that first Easter morning. By virtue of His resurrection, we have two things that are of the utmost importance, have the most lasting significance for our existence, and which we can obtain nowhere else.

First, you have unshakable and certain knowledge. John writes in our text, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” Notice carefully what John says. He does not say that you may think you have eternal life, or believe that you have eternal life, or even that you hope you have eternal life. Jesus’ resurrection means you *know* you have eternal life.

This strikes many people as being arrogant. In former times, it would have been considered arrogant because people would think you were making a claim about yourself and some merit of your own by which you would get eternal life. Today, it is considered arrogant to claim to know truth of any kind. Uncertainty is more in vogue these days. It is considered a sign of tolerance and open mindedness to claim you can’t really know anything for certain, especially in the areas of spirituality and religion. To claim that you DO know something for sure in your faith is to be close minded and intolerant of other faiths.

However to know that you have eternal life is not to claim any merit of your own but to trust in the merit of Jesus Christ. We know from the Word of God that the cause of death is sin – rebellion against the will of God. The Word of God says that Jesus Christ laid down His life as the complete payment for all sin. All who are joined to Christ by faith have their sin and its consequences removed.

In Holy Baptism, each of us has been joined to Christ. The Word of God says that we have been baptized into His death and burial. That means that His death is the death for our sins. His burial is the burial of our sins. Through baptism, we are also joined to Jesus’ resurrection. What happens to Jesus will happen to us. As He has been raised from the dead to live forever, we, too, will be raised from death to live forever. He gives us His body and blood in Holy Communion to keep us in union with Him throughout our earthly life. Through Him and Him alone, we know for certain that we have eternal life.

Secondly, John says that we have confidence. Confidence in spiritual matters also sounds arrogant and risky. But it’s only arrogant if it’s confidence in yourself. You are a sinful human being.

It's only risky if it's confidence in your actions. As a sinner, each of us often does what is wrong and fails to do what is right.

Confidence, though, is the byproduct of knowledge. Our confidence is not in our sinful selves or our imperfect actions. Our confidence is outside ourselves. Our confidence is in the One whom we know to be holy in essence and perfect in action: Jesus Christ. Our confidence in praying is not in our worthiness to be heard or our intensity or persistence in prayer. Our confidence is that, when we pray according to his will he hears us and answers us according to that same good and gracious will. We are confident in God and His love for us in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32) We are confident that He will do what He has promised to do for us, not only in giving us the eternal life that we know is ours, but also in providing for needs here and now.

The question is not whether 50 days is too long to celebrate the meaning and blessing of Easter, but whether it is long enough. We can live our entire lives, knowing exactly where our future will end up. We may not know all the twists and turns, joys and sorrows, pleasures and pain along way, but we do know the worst evil and suffering will not continue forever and we do know the greatest good and joy get better. We know the final destination: eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord, with unimaginable joy and pleasure in the presence of God and all of His saints who have gone before us and will follow us.

While we wait for this knowledge to become a reality, we live with complete confidence, not always in ourselves or our circumstances because we can fail and circumstances can disappoint, but in Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has not failed and does not disappoint. Because of His work on our behalf, we can confidently approach God in prayer, knowing that when we pray according to His will (as we do every time we say the Lord's Prayer), He not only will hear us, but give us the requests we have asked of him. Therefore, we pray boldly. As the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us, "Let us then

approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

So, never stop celebrating Easter. Celebrate for 50 days! Celebrate every Sunday as a “mini-Easter”! Celebrate every day of the year, knowing that you have eternal life waiting for you, no matter what happens, and having confidence in Christ to be able to approach Him in prayer with every need, every request, and every problem that you have, being assured that His good and gracious will for you will be accomplished. Celebrate now until that celebration reaches its culmination when knowledge becomes reality, confidence turns to sight, and Easter lasts forever! Amen.