



The Parish of Saints Philip and James
1 Carow Place, St. James, NY 11780

631-584-5454

April 12th, 2020
Easter Sunday
Of the Resurrection of the Lord



*"This is the day the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad."
Psalm 118*

*"With Philip & James we pray to live lives worthy of the call to be
Apostles of Hope"*

Daily Mass: 7:30am and 9:15 am
Saturday 5pm Sunday: 8am 10 am 12noon

STS. PHILIP & JAMES PASTORAL STAFF

Parish Center Phone: 631-584-5454 Parish Fax: 631-862-9675

Website—www.sspj.org

PARISH CENTER OFFICE HOURS

Open Monday, Tuesday Wednesday 9am-8pm

Open Thursday 9am-5pm

Open Saturday 10am-2pm

Closed Friday and Sunday

CLERGY

Father Tom Haggerty, Pastor

Father Patrick Osei-Poku-Associate Pastor

Deacon Ronald Blasius

Deacon John Keenan

Deacon Ken Maher

PASTORAL ASSOCIATE

Sister Theresita Donach, CSFN

BUSINESS MANAGER

Virginia Portanova

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR

Catherine Darrow

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 1-2

Charlotte Czujko

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 3-6

Barbara Luna

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 7-8

Dominick Avento

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Margaret Adams

COORDINATOR OF PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

Lynn Sisti

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Dominick Avento

DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES

John Cordes

SSPJ SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Diane M. Anderson

School Phone-631-584-7896 School Fax: 631-584-3258

TRUSTEES

Jerry Linder ~ Tina Cafaro

PASTORAL COUNCIL

Michael Sharkey, Lou Guerra, Cynthia Lombardi, Paul Damato
Martin Marut, Maureen Burke, Erin Nicastro



Sacraments

Baptism— Celebrated twice per month. Parents are asked to register at the Pastoral Center for Pre-Baptism Program.

Marriage— Couples are asked to contact the Pastoral Center before visiting the reception hall. The Marriage Preparation process is nine months before your proposed wedding date.

Confirmation— Seventh and Eighth grade students are prepared to celebrate through Religious Ed or SSPJ School. Adults prepare through RCIA.


Reconciliation— Available Saturdays from 4:00pm-5:00pm in the Church or by contacting the Parish Center for an appointment.

Anointing of the Sick— In case of serious, unexpected illness, please contact the Parish Center office to arrange for a Priest to pray with the person who is ill. Anointing of the Sick is held on the first Sunday of the month following the 8:00am mass please see the Sacristan before mass.

R.C.I.A.— Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (non-Catholic adults desiring to become Catholic) are asked to contact the Parish Center Office.

Eucharistic Adoration In The Church— Thursday 2-4pm
Friday 8-9pm

PLEASE REMEMBER THOSE WHO SERVE FOR US IN YOUR PRAYERS



LCDR. MEGAN M. SHUTKA-VIK, USN
CAPT. WILSON MARKS- USN
CAPTAIN MICHAEL DOLAN- JR.
LT. COL. JOHN KAIRES
SPC. NICOLE A. CANNON
SGM. MICHAEL P. BORRELLI-US ARMY
CAPT. JOHN TULLY- USN
LT. COL. JAMES TULLY-US ARMY
JOSEPH SAGGIO- USNC
CAPTAIN PAUL WILLMS
STAFF SGT. MICHAEL LONGHENRY
LT. COL. PAUL T. JACKSON-
STAFF SGT ALEXANDER PARRELLA-USAF
RICHARD SOTOMAYER- USAF
SGT. CONNOR F. SCOTT- USMC
SGT. CORY O'HARA -USMC
CDR. ROBERT J. MARSH-USN
PFC. CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HOWELL
STEVEN CAVA-USN
ERIC SEELIN- USMC
CW2 CHRIS MUNZ
CW2 NATASHA WORTMAN
CORPORAL JAMES T. CASEY-USMC
GREGORY DEVANEY- USMC
SGT. JOSHUA MAHONEY- US ARMY
KEVIN JONES-USCG
PRIVATE JOSHUA OLSEN-USARNG
GLEN CRIMA-US ARMY
STAFF SGT. ANTHONY SCIAMETTA— US ARMY
MARIO CATANIA-USMC
RYAN ANTHONY NASCIMENTO-USMC
KYLE ANTHONY NASCIMENTO-US ARMY
ENS. RYAN M. SHOWS—USN
STAFF SGT. RYAN REXRODE-USMC
DR. KARA VANDEKIEFT, COL.-USAF
SGT. STEPHEN D. OUTCAULT-USMC
PAUL MUMOLO-USN
VICTORIA ZEMAN, USCG
KYLE J. GRUNER—US ARMY
MARK GIORDANO—US COASTGUARD
KELLI MCLAUGHLIN— 2ND LT. US ARMY NATL. GUARD
STAFF SGT MICHAEL J BANG SPECIAL FORCES US ARMY

Financial Support Needed weekly to meet Parish budget:

Weekly Collection: Sunday, March 29th, 2020

Faith Direct:

\$ 557.

\$ 2,877.

\$17,800.

Total Weekly Collection:

\$3,434.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

****updated figures unavailable by early submission date****

Father Tom's Letter

Dear Friends,

Happy Easter!

“Who would have thought?”... The disciples when facing the Easter reality may well have asked this question. During these past weeks, facing a different reality, haven't we raised the same question, “who would have thought?” Our world has changed. Today, with our Easter faith, we disciples of the Risen Lord pray, “Lord, help us lead from a world falling apart to one falling into place.”

The resurrection is really the beginning place for our faith, not the end. Without it, Jesus would've faded into the pages of history. He would have no more lasting impact than countless other itinerant preachers and healers who walked the dusty roads of first century Palestine. Some of his wisdom was borrowed from others, some of his actions were claimed by others. But because of the resurrection, we now must look at his life from a completely different perspective. Welcoming the outcast, loving the enemy, giving freedom to the oppressed, calling the poor in spirit and meek “blessed” – these are no longer the musings of a madman but rather the way to life itself, sanctioned by God.

To live the mystery of the resurrection is to live with the unquenchable hope that death, that disease, is not the ultimate reality that defines us. Neither are violence, hatred, prejudice, apathy, insecurity, or any other manifestations of death that we encounter every day. Rather it is life that has God's final word for us, revealed in the resurrection of Christ.

For some, the resurrection points mainly to a reality beyond death and to the promise of life eternal for all who believe. However, for the apostle Paul, the meaning of resurrection is in the present. “You have been raised to life with Christ”, he wrote. It is not news for a few but for all. It did not depend on a person's goodness but on grace. If only we all knew that we were raised with him, what a difference it would make!

Several years ago, I helped a friend build a pen in his backyard to house the new puppy. They trained the dog to go out the door of their house and into the pen. They would then close the door behind him so that they didn't need to be on constant watch. After two years, they found that they no longer needed to close the door, as the dog would enter his pen and never think of leaving it, having accepted that enclosure as the boundaries of his life. What about us? Is the risen Christ calling us beyond boundaries into the wild, the unknown, the giddy confusion caused by the gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – where we can live the mystery of resurrection life?

Let's be led and lead into a new world falling into place! As Apostles of Hope let us sing and live anew “I say “yes” my Lord, to every word I speak”.

As a sign of our being raised to new life in Christ each family is encouraged to place a copy of the Paschal Lamb found online in the bulletin on the front window or storm door of your home, witnessing to who and what we believe as Christians: We are an Easter people and alleluia is our song! The Paschal Lamb symbolizes the Risen Lord, the Lamb of God - the Christian symbol of the Passover Sacrifice of Jesus from death to life.

Peace,

Father Tom

Apostles: We Who Are Sent...Hope: God's constant gift of new possibilities



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Easter 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

None of us could have imagined even weeks ago, that we would celebrate Holy Week and Easter Sunday *virtually*.

I have been amazed and inspired by the creativity and initiative of our pastors, our people and our parishes to continue evangelizing all of Long Island.

Whether it is video-streaming Masses and Eucharistic adoration, conducting a virtual parish mission, or a health precaution sensitive Eucharistic procession through neighborhoods, you are all moving forward and trusting in the transformative power of the Risen Christ as we continue to experience the tragedies, trauma, unemployment, financial and economic distress of the COVID-19 crisis.

The light that streams from the glorified wounds of the Risen Jesus always touches and transforms our wounds and fears, and the wounds and fears of the world.

We remember in a special way this Easter Sunday and throughout the Easter season the souls of those who have died from the corona virus and their families, and those who, as Pope Francis says, are "writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, deacons, religious men and women and so very many others." We remember our families and the efforts of each of us to care for our families and our neighbors.

While we are all in pain that our Holy Week 2020 needs to be a virtual one, we do have a Pastoral Letter, *The Great Week: A Pilgrimage with the Lord in Holy Week* which can help strengthen, lift and inspire our virtual Holy Week celebrations.

This Pastoral Letter is a user-friendly, easily understandable synthesis of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum, its liturgical theology, spirituality and history, designed to show the relationship between the Sacred Liturgies of Holy Week and Catholic Evangelization.

I encourage everyone to participate in all the Holy Week liturgies virtually through the Catholic Faith Network (see: catholicfaithnetwork.org for details) and through your own parishes streaming the liturgies.

DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Let's take this unique and virtual evangelization opportunity to pray that the Risen Christ might lead a massive return of Catholic Long Islanders to a full, active and conscious participation in our Holy Week liturgies and our Sunday Masses throughout the year.

I encourage you all to read and pray our Pastoral Letter which is available on our diocesan website DRVC.org and in the March 2020 *Long Island Catholic* magazine that many of you received at home.

I also had the opportunity on March 27, 2020, to share the Pastoral Letter with every American Bishop in the United States for possible use in their dioceses as they celebrate virtual Holy Weeks around the country.

I received an email from the Bishop of Fairbanks, Alaska. He thanked the Diocese of Rockville Centre for sharing the Holy Week Pastoral Letter with the people of Fairbanks, Alaska and said: "We have 37 remote parishes of Native Alaskans, pretty much on 'lock down' that could benefit enormously from the Pastoral Letter."

Catholic Long Islanders stand in the solidarity of the Risen Lord with Catholic Alaskans! This is just another example of the global Catholic solidarity that our Holy Father Pope Francis models for us and calls us to.

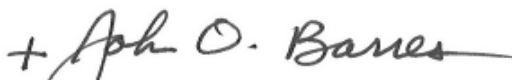
Thank you for continuing to support your parish and the vital ministries of our Church as your means allow during this most challenging time for all of us. The Church continues to serve the spiritual and physical needs of people during this crisis. Weekly collections mailed or given online will be critical to the sustaining and reemergence of our parishes.

Our Easter joy may be delayed this year, but our faith, hope and trust in the power of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection must shine brighter than ever. The cross of this crisis offers us the opportunity for a renewed and lasting appreciation for the gift of family and the transformative power of faith.

Know that you and all your families are in my heart and in my prayers as we celebrate *The Great Week*, Easter Sunday, the Easter Octave, Divine Mercy Sunday and the Easter Season.

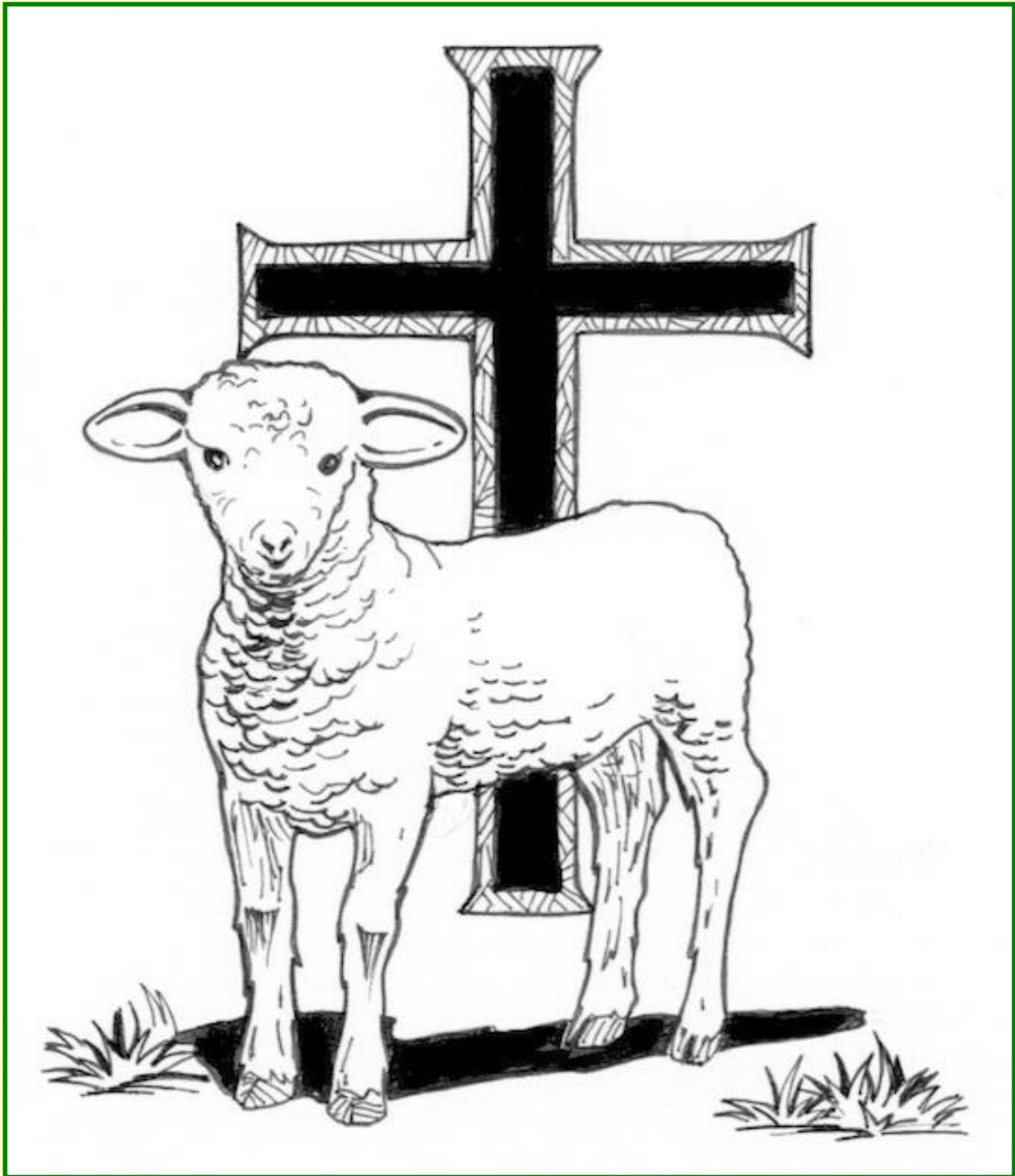
He is Risen! Alleluia!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre

He is Risen



Alleluia



A Prayer of Easter Gratitude

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. -Psalm 118:1

We rejoice, Jesus, for signs of new life we see around us, especially for:

We are glad for the many blessings we have received this Easter, especially for:

We give you thanks for the generous people in our lives, especially for:

Fill our hearts with gratitude throughout this holy season, and shower us with the grace of your merciful love.

In your holy name, we pray.
Amen.

DEAR PARISHIONERS,

WE KINDLY ASK THAT IF POSSIBLE, PERHAPS YOU CAN SIGN UP FOR FAITH DIRECT: BY SIGNING ONTO OUR PARISH WEBSITE: SSPJ.ORG AND SCROLLING DOWN ON THE HOME PAGE WHERE YOU WILL COME TO A FAITH DIRECT INFORMATIONAL SECTION.

OUR COLLECTIONS ARE VERY SPARSE AND YET EXPENSES ARE STILL INCURRED.

YOU CAN STILL REQUEST MASS CARDS, AND ALTAR MEMORIALS BY LEAVING A MESSAGE AT THE PARISH CENTER OFFICE AT 631-584-5454.

Thank you for your understanding and generosity.



Our Challenges at this time of Crisis

- ◆ Beginning Monday, March 16, 2020 at 3:00pm, all Masses (weekday & weekend), liturgies, devotions, meetings, and non-essential activities in our parish are suspended or postponed through April 13, 2020, *subject to change*. This will include all Holy Week and Easter Liturgies. However, these will be televised on the Catholic Faith Network (CFN) Optimum channel 29/137, Verizon channel 296, Spectrum channel 162/471.
- ◆ We are "Livestreaming Mass at SSPJ" at 9:15am Monday through Sunday. To access the livestream mass, visit sspj.org, select sign up to our Facebook Page to view.
- ◆ We have celebrated daily Masses honoring the intentions of those who requested the Mass as well as for all our parishioners and our world.
- ◆ Our Church is open 7am-7pm weekdays for private prayer and will be open Saturday from 7am-3pm and Sundays from 7am-3noon.
- ◆ Sts. Philip & James Religious Education Program has been suspended for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. Religious Ed will update everyone as quickly as possible as information is changing rapidly. Our religious education department will be sending out grade specific e-mails within the next week.
- ◆ If there is an emergency, contact our Parish Center Office at 631-584-5454 Select Option: 0 and leave a message. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.
- ◆ **PLEASE CONTINUE TO REFER TO OUR PARISH WEBSITE: SSPJ.ORG FOR UPDATES AND IMPORTANT PARISH INFORMATION.**



FOOD PANTRY NEEDS THE FOLLOWING:

GRAPE JELLY
WHITE RICE
TOILET PAPER
BARS OF SOAP
GALLON JUGS OF WATER
SMALL CONTAINERS LAUNDRY DETERGENT
BOXED MILK
SAMPLE SIZE SHAMPOO
GAS GIFT CARDS

Any donations may be left in the Church Prayer Room or the St. Anthony's Bread Closet.
As always, thank you and God bless you for your generous response.

Green Your Laundry Routine

(except in times of health crisis)

- Use cold water when washing clothes to reduce energy use. Energy is needed to heat water. You can also opt for a shorter wash cycle.
- Only do laundry when the load is full. Not only does this save water and electricity but it also saves you money and time. You can either wait until you have more items to wash or combine your partial load with your family or housemates.
- Avoid using energy to dry your laundry by hanging a laundry line or using a drying rack. This cuts down on your electricity bill as well!

SSPJ Parish Calendar For The Week of April 12th, 2020

Monday, April 13th, 2020
NO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Tuesday, April 14th, 2020:
NO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Wednesday, April 15th, 2020
NO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Thursday, April 16th, 2020:
NO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Friday, April 17th, 2020
7:00pm AA Meeting
Philip & James Room

Saturday, April 18th, 2020
NO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Sunday, April 19th, 2020
7:00pm AA Meeting
Philip & James Room

Mass Intentions, For the week of April 12th, 2020

Saturday, April 11th, 2020
5:00pm No Intentions

Sunday, April 12th 2020~Easter Sunday
8:00am Easter Novena
10:00am For the Parishioners of SSPJ
12:00Noon Collective Mass:
No Intentions

Monday, April 13th, 2020
7:30am Easter Novena
9:15am Michael Bohenek

Tuesday, Wednesday, April 14th, 2020
7:30am Easter Novena
9:15am Charles & Stella Hartigan

Wednesday, April 15th, 2020
7:30am Easter Novena
9:15am Joseph Caltabiano

Thursday, April 16th, 2020
7:30am Easter Novena
9:15am Collective Mass:
Donna Funicelli

Friday, April 17th, 2020
7:30am Easter Novena
9:15am Eugene Krug

Saturday, April 18th, 2020
9:15am Easter Novena
5:00pm John Doran

Sunday, April 19th, 2020
8:00am Easter Novena
10:00am For the Parishioners of Sts. Philip & James
12:00Noon Collective Mass:
Donald Donaudy
Andrew Krauer
Kathryn Peter
Alice Buthmann
Frank Cotoia



**Remembering in Our Prayers~
Those who are ill**

The Pro-Life Rose
For the Week of April 12th, 2020
Is Offered for,
My Dear Daughter,
Andrea Jean Martin
50 Years in Heaven
Miss you,
Love,
Mommy

- Adrian Erias
 - Angela Amoroso
 - Arthur Gureck
 - Anna Capizzio
 - Barbara Bombace
 - Baby Mattia Rose Lubrano
 - Belinda Groneman
 - Belinda Vega
 - Bob Keenan
 - Claudia Chandler
 - Daniel Radice
 - Deirdre W.
 - Diana C.
 - Dorothy E. Mitchell
 - Donalea Donach
 - Ellie Walsh
 - Frank Cotoia
 - Gladys Blake
 - Gregory Parker
 - Joan Kranz
 - Jim McLean
 - John DeStefano
 - J.C.
- And for all the prayers
intentions offered in our
Prayer baskets
For our Nation in time of crisis

- Joseph S.
- Joseph G.
- Joyce Wiggins
- Judy Contrino
- Kathleen N.
- Kitty Cronin
- Leon Donach
- Maria Clark
- Matthew Parrella
- Melissa C.
- Michael Fisher
- Mike Lofaro
- Patricia Acker
- Peter Donach
- P.I.
- Philip G
- Ricardo Buffit
- Richard Cembrale
- Sara Jean Andersen
- Steve Rannazzisi
- Tim Cavooris
- Vivien Cordes
- Vicki Archdeacon
- William Quinn

Prayer for the Sick

**God of love, ever caring, ever strong
stand by us in our time of need.**

Watch over your children who are sick.

Look after them in every danger.

And grant them your healing and peace.

Amen

If you wish to include a name
on our prayer listing, kindly
contact the Parish Center
Office at 631-584-5454

“I Say YES My Lord”

**SSPJ SCHOOL GUILD
SAYS YES!**

“Being an Apostle of Hope, looking towards the light, trying to embrace bite size pieces of time to give whatever we can to work collaboratively and connect with each other”

“Making a sacrifice for my children to learn and give them the gift of God by sending them to Catholic school.”

“Making the difficult decisions, and sacrificing for our kids, setting the example, and doing the things that you sometimes don’t want to do to be able to be a good example for my kids, friends and family.”

“having not had the opportunity to go to Catholic School myself, saying yes to a community that is close to God with love and support of our children”

“the power, love and patience of a Catholic school for a child, giving my child the power and grace of God to hold that child, and allow the spirit in.

“an amazing faculty and staff who are incredibly special, dedicated and committed to the growth of our children, who say yes every day, by coming in early and staying late for our students .”

“doing the right thing, helping others even when they may not know they need help...being fishers of men”

“not taking for granted the privilege of being Catholic-appreciating our Catholic faith”

WE

SAY

Pope St. Pius X—stated—“Among all the devotions approved by the church none has been so favored by so many miracles as the devotion to the most holy rosary.

Pope St. Pius X also stated—“The rosary is the most beautiful of all prayers. It is the prayer that touches most the heart of the Mother of God.”

At Fatima, Our Lady asked the three shepherd children to pray the rosary every day for peace in the world.

The SSPJ Rosary Makers feel blessed and humbled to spread this devotion. We have done so by making and sending over 70,000 rosaries throughout the world. How many lives we have touched by assisting Our Lady in her request to pray the rosary for peace in the world and peace in our families.

We meet the first Monday of each month. Please consider joining us in assisting Our Lady in her request.

God Love You!

YES

**SSPJ ROSARY MAKERS
SAY YES!**

The SSPJ School Community wishes everyone a
Happy Easter!



Easter
Blessings





**2020
CMA
Goal**

\$111,000

"Lent is a favorable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day."

- Pope Francis

Dear Friends:

During the special Lenten season, please allow me to share a special request with you. If you have never contributed to the Catholic Ministries Appeal, or if you haven't contributed in a number of years, please consider making this the year that you join with me and other members of our Parish family to make a donation to the 2020 Appeal.

As you may already be aware, 100% of all the money raised is used to support the ministries of the Appeal that serve more than 600,000 people each year, and our parish shares in the money raised to use for our own local needs.

These programs include services to people in need; affordable housing for senior citizens; people with disabilities and our veterans; respect life initiatives; and formation of our priests, deacons, lay leaders, and young people. These are just a few of the programs that help make our church and this Island a vibrant and wonderful place to live.

But to help ensure that we can always serve those who come to us for aid, support and spiritual guidance, we need help from you!

If 100 of our parishioners who have not supported us in the recent past made a \$25 contribution this year – think about how many more people we could help! If that amount is more than you can manage, consider \$5 or \$10.

Every gift counts and makes a difference in the lives of others! THANK YOU!!

Make checks payable to:

Catholic Ministries Appeal
STS. PHILIP & JAMES #148

Parish _____ Pledge: \$ _____

Name _____ Down payment: \$ _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip: _____

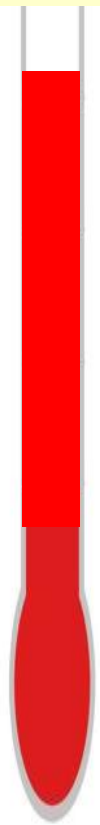
Phone: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

To make a donation, you can also visit drvc.org/CMA
or call us at 516-678-5800 ext. 296
Thank You!

**DUE TO
OFFICE
CLOSURES
UPDATED
#S WERE
NOT
RECEIVED
AS OF 3/17/20**

**Pledges at
3/10/2020
\$58,605**

**Payments
At
3/10/2020
\$30,495**



Preparing for the Second Sunday of Easter (next week)

April 19, 2020 • 2nd Sunday of Easter • Year A

Blessing Instead of Shaming

This Week's Readings at Mass

- ▶ Acts 2:42-47 - Communal life
- ▶ 1 Peter 1:3-9 - Thanksgiving
- ▶ John 20:19-31 - Appearance to the disciples; Thomas

The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the joyous, loving, and radical community that formed among believers after Jesus' resurrection. Their lives of love, generosity, and justice were so inspiring that they quickly attracted others to them. Their example of Christian community has inspired many others down through the ages who want to tap into that experience of unity and joy based on their faith in Jesus. If they could come together to lead such meaningful and fulfilling lives, can't we?

This Gospel reading, often called the "Doubting Thomas" story is an example of a common phenomenon that we still wonder about today. How is it that some people come to faith in Jesus/God so easily, while for others it is a struggle that requires some sort of "proof"? There is no good answer to this question, but according to this story, the experience isn't new.

The disciples who were present when Jesus appeared among them for the first time rejoice and receive the peace he offers as soon as he shows himself to them.

While they may have been surprised, a bit afraid, and confused at first, they move quickly to accept his presence and are eager to spread the news of his resurrection. On the other hand, Thomas—like many of us—wants proof, and he is not shy about laying out the specifics of what he needs to see before he will believe.

When Jesus appears to him in person a week later, he obliges and shows Thomas what he needs to believe. Jesus does not criticize Thomas for his doubts or

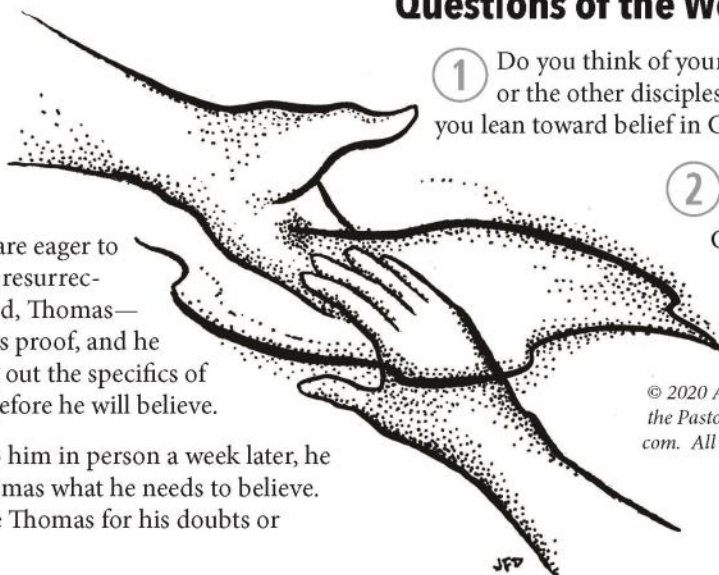


ridicule him for wanting proof. Jesus doesn't belittle doubters. He *wants* them to believe, but he will not force it. Jesus knows that he will not walk the earth for much longer, and he anticipates that many will have to come to believe in him without ever seeing him. Jesus blesses those people (us included!) "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed," without shaming those like Thomas who just can't come to belief so easily.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Do you think of yourself more like Thomas or the other disciples in terms of how easily you lean toward belief in God's work?
- 2 Is there an area of your life now in which God might be inviting you to be more trusting?

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The Empty Tomb

Easter 2017

Believers and non-believers alike have been arguing about the resurrection since the day Jesus rose. What really happened? How was he raised from the dead? Did an actual dead body really come back to life and step out of the grave or was the resurrection a monumental life-changing event inside the consciousness of Jesus' followers? Or was the resurrection both, a real physical event and an event inside the consciousness of believers?

Obviously nobody was there to see what actually happened. Those who claimed Jesus was alive again didn't see him rise and emerge from the tomb, they met him only after he had already risen and, immediately, believers and sceptics began to divide from each other, persons who claimed to have touched him and persons who doubted that testimony.

There have been sceptics and believers ever since and no shortage of persons, professional theologians and non-scholarly Christians alike, who believe in the resurrection of Jesus as a faith event but not as a physical event, where an actual body came out of a grave. The faith event is what's important, they claim, and it is incidental whether or not Jesus' actual body came out of the grave.

Was Jesus' resurrection a faith event or a physical event? It was both. For Christians it is the most monumental event, faith and otherwise, in history. Two thousand subsequent years cannot be explained, except by the reality of the resurrection. To understand the resurrection of Jesus only as a literal fact, that his body rose from the grave, is to cut the resurrection off from much of its meaning. However, that being admitted, for Christians, the resurrection must also be a radically physical event. Why?

First, because the Gospels are pretty clear in emphasizing that the tomb was empty and that the resurrected Jesus was more than a spirit or ghost. We see, for instance, in Luke's Gospel where Jesus invites a doubting Thomas to verify his physicality: "Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me. Touch me. You can see that I have a living body; a ghost does not have a body like this."

As well, and very importantly, to cut the resurrection off from the literal fact that there was real physical transformation of a once dead corpse is to rob it of some of its important meanings and perhaps of the deepest root of its credibility. For the resurrection of Christ to have full meaning it must, among other things, have been a brute physical fact. There needs to be an empty tomb and a dead body returned to life. Why?

Not as some kind of miracle proof, but because of the incarnation. To believe in the incarnation and not to believe in the radical physical character of the resurrection is a contradiction. We believe that in the incarnation the Word was made flesh. This takes the mystery of Christ and the reality of the resurrection out of the realm of pure spirit. The incarnation always connotes a reality that's radically physical, tangible, and touchable, like the old dictionary definition of matter as "something extended in space and having weight."

To believe in the incarnation is to believe that God was born into real physical flesh, lived in real physical flesh, died in real physical flesh, and rose in real physical flesh. To believe that the resurrection was only an event in the faith consciousness of the disciples, however real, rich, and radical that might be imagined, is to rob the incarnation of its radical physical character and to fall into the kind of dualism that values spirit and denigrates the physical. Such a dualism devalues the incarnation and this impoverishes the meaning of the resurrection. If the resurrection is only a spiritual event then it is also only an anthropological one and not also a cosmic one. That's a way of saying that it's then an event only about human consciousness and not also about the cosmos.

But Jesus' resurrection isn't just something radically new in terms of human consciousness; it's also something that's radically new in terms of atoms and molecules. The resurrection rearranged hearts and minds, but it also rearranged atoms. Until Jesus' resurrection, dead bodies did not come back to life; they stayed dead, so when his came back to life there was something radically new both at the level of faith and at the level of the atoms and molecules. Precisely because of its brute physicality, Jesus' resurrection offers new hope to atoms as well as to people.

I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, literally. I believe too that this event was, as the rich insights within contemporary theology point out, highly spiritual: an event of faith, of changed consciousness, of new hope empowering a new charity and a new forgiveness. But it was also an event of changed atoms and of a changed dead body. It was radically physical, just as are all events that are part of the incarnation wherein God takes on real flesh.