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MARCH 2024 ISSUE

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

THE MAGAZINE

*Allow Holy Week
to Change Your Life*

Reflect on the Days That Transformed the World



The Pathway of
Holy Thursday



Holy Saturday and
The Grace of Waiting



The Good Friday
Funeral

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ETP: The Magazine

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What is The Empty Tomb Project?

Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine is a non-profit that exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if men and women encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are an evangelization company that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island (and beyond).

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we rely on the faithful designers at Startup Catholic so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out via email: EmptyTombProject@gmail.com and join us in the mission! All donations are tax deductible.

Me? A Palm Sunday Character?

By Theresa Marino

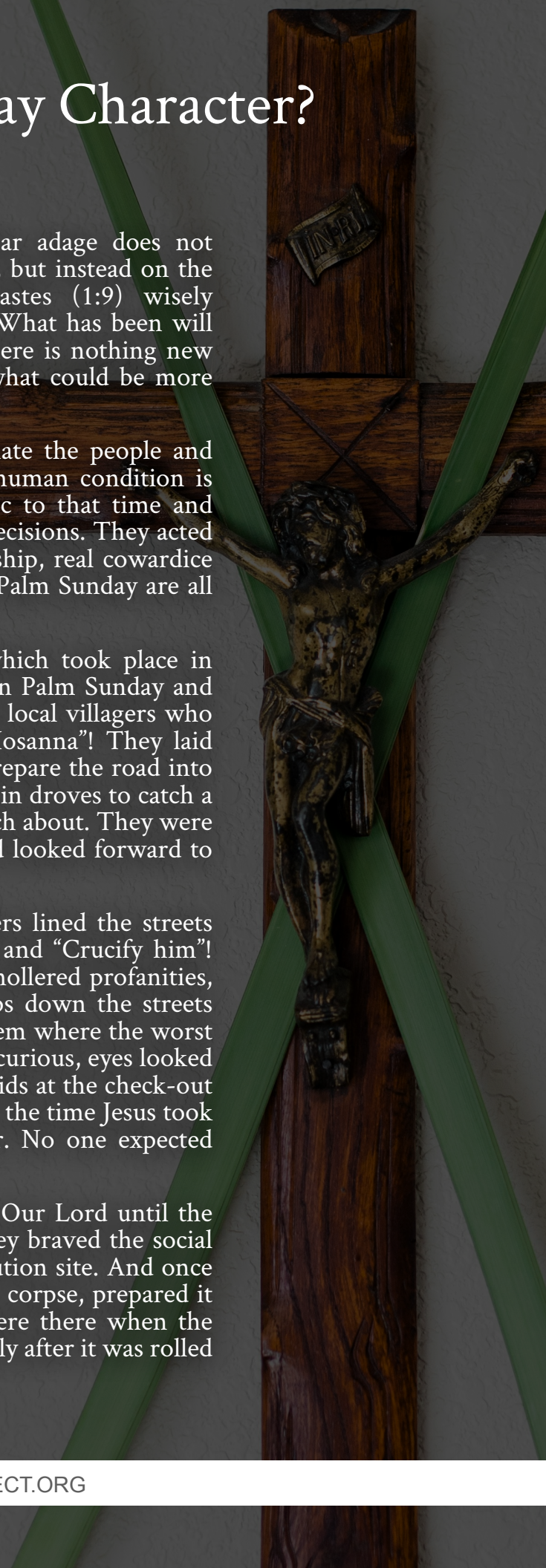
There is nothing new under the sun. This familiar adage does not originate on the pages of Shakespeare, Plato or Jung, but instead on the pages of Scripture itself. The Book of Ecclesiastes (1:9) wisely characterizes our human experience by remarking, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." What a revelation! If this is true, what could be more beneficial for our future than understanding our past?

As we approach Holy Week, it is vital to contemplate the people and events of those days in light of the truth that our human condition is nothing new. While the circumstances were specific to that time and place, all involved were real people. They faced real decisions. They acted in response to real fear, real compassion, real friendship, real cowardice and real ambition. The characters we hear about on Palm Sunday are all inside of us.

Let's consider the pendulum of human reactions which took place in response to the Presence of Jesus in the days between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. On Sunday, the streets were lined with local villagers who heralded the entrance of a King with the words "Hosanna"! They laid palm branches before the feet of Christ's animal to prepare the road into the heart of Jerusalem - the Holy City. They gathered in droves to catch a glimpse of this local celebrity who they'd heard so much about. They were curious and fascinated by all that Jesus had done, and looked forward to what he would do next. No one wanted to miss it.

Just five days later, Good Friday, those same villagers lined the streets once again. This time, with jeers of hatred, disdain and "Crucify him"! Along the way of his suffering, they spat upon him, hollered profanities, laughed at and mocked him. They followed his steps down the streets once again, but this time, to a place outside of Jerusalem where the worst criminals were murdered and made examples of. Still curious, eyes looked on in fascination but similar to the way we read tabloids at the check-out counter of our local grocery store. Most were gone by the time Jesus took his last breath and gave up his Spirit to the Father. No one expected anything more of him after this horrible death.

There are, of course, those few who stayed close to Our Lord until the end. They wept with him as he carried his cross. They braved the social stigma and physical dangers of remaining at his execution site. And once Christ had died, they tenderly removed his disfigured corpse, prepared it for burial, and procured a borrowed tomb. They were there when the stone was rolled in front of His place of rest, and shortly after it was rolled away again three days later.





Peter who denied, the soldiers who scourged, the women who wept, the onlookers who spat, Pilate who washed his hands, John who remained, Judas who betrayed, the thief who mocked, Veronica who comforted, Mary who trusted, Caiaphas who schemed... they are all us insofar as we repeat their transgressions or their kindnesses towards God today. While 2,000 years separate us from the circumstances of Jesus' physical trial and crucifixion, there is not a breath's distance separating us from his Presence and this mystery at this very moment. When we deny our love for God in moments of embarrassment, betray Christ's commands in decisions of ambition, spat upon Jesus' teachings in moments of pride and scheme against the Church - we actually transcend time and cause Jesus' death just as those soldiers did on that first Good Friday.

St. Alphonsus Liguori captures this mystical reality beautifully in his meditation on Christ's Passion: "My adorable Jesus, it was not Pilate, no, it was my sins that condemned you to die." And elsewhere, "It is not the weight of the cross, but of my sins, which have made you suffer so much pain."

How many of us have resolved this Lenten Season to abstain from cursing, lustful thoughts, sugar, anger, laziness... only to find that we cannot keep that noble oath just hours later? Jesus said to Peter at the Last Supper, "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). He could say that to any of us today, because we are nothing new.

The reason for our penances during Lent is precisely because our humanity is just like that of those who were close to Christ during Holy Week. We need to practice virtue in small things so that when we are put to the test in big things we can have the courage not to abandon God but to love him in the face of the worst events of life.

Theresa Marino is a New York native who has served the Catholic Church throughout her twenties in various ministry capacities. Currently a middle school Religion Teacher, she has also worked in high school campus ministry, music ministry, mission work and parish settings.



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We invite all families to join us on **Good Friday** for our annual service at **Cemetery of the Holy Rood**. **Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island** has a long tradition of hosting **Stations of the Cross** during Lent. During this prayer service, we will follow a 1.5 mile route throughout Holy Rood as we pray and commemorate Our Lord's redemptive death.

Stations of the Cross – Good Friday

Date/Time: **Friday, March 29, 2024 at 12 Noon**

Location: **Cemetery of the Holy Rood**
111 Old Country Rd, Westbury

- After opening prayers in Holy Rood Chapel, we will begin a 1.5 mile pilgrimage through the cemetery, stopping at each of the 14 Stations to pray and reflect
- Service concludes with final prayers and Veneration of the Cross in the Chapel



Please note: In the case of inclement weather, the full service will be held in Holy Rood Chapel

Families unable to join us on Good Friday are invited to participate in a self-directed Stations of the Cross prayer service at **Cemetery of the Holy Rood** or **Queen of Peace Cemetery**.

Self-Directed Stations of the Cross

- Offered at **Cemetery of the Holy Rood** and **Queen of Peace Cemetery** throughout Lent. Families may complete the self-directed prayer service at a time convenient to them.
- **Holy Rood:** Families may pick up a prayer booklet with map from Holy Rood Chapel before following the 1.5 mile route through the cemetery to pray the Stations of the Cross.
- **Queen of Peace:** Families can pray the Stations of the Cross in Queen of Peace Chapel as they walk to each Station located on the Chapel walls. Prayer booklets will be available in the Chapel.



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The Pathway of Holy Thursday

By Matthew Chicavich

The account of the Last Supper, which we commemorate on Holy Thursday, is the first day of the Easter Triduum. In John's Gospel it begins like this: "Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). The stage is set. Tremendous weight can be felt in John's words: The weight of finality and sorrow. But, for those who know how the story ends there is also the anticipation of newness, joy, and life. Soon, everything will change forever: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). If it were not for the deep love that undergirds the sorrow, this would be a tragic last meal.

Prayerfully entering into Holy Thursday is encountering a day of great paradox. Sorrow is present, yet so is joy. Amidst the shadow of suffering is the anticipation of new life. The wounds of betrayal and denial are encompassed by the healing power of Christ's self-sacrifice and love.

John tells us that "Jesus was deeply troubled" (John 13:21). Jesus is sharing his final meal with his closest disciples before he is brutally tortured and murdered. Jesus reveals that one present will hand him over to be killed. He tells Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn 13:27). Imagine the betrayal Jesus must have felt. Perhaps even worse, Peter professes his undying loyalty to Jesus: "I will lay down my life for you" (Jn. 13:37). Jesus must correct Peter: "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times" (Jn. 13:38). Imagine the abandonment Christ must have experienced. The entire scene is ripe with sorrow.

Still, what a remarkable event this institution of the Eucharist is. How many billions of Eucharistic liturgies have found their birth at this moment? How many souls have come to know the love of God through his Eucharistic presence? Prior to ascending into heaven, Jesus assures the disciples: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). The Eucharist is the fulfillment of this promise. It is an occasion that can be reflected on with great joy.



Despite the pain that Jesus knows he will experience he desires to give his disciples his Presence in the Eucharist and an example to never forget. With the battle of good versus evil approaching, Christ washes his disciples' feet. Think of how stunned the disciples would have been to watch this. The same Jesus who gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, the mute speak and raised the dead is serving them in the most humble of ways. They are to love one another as he loved them. Even though he will be beaten and killed by humanity he still serves.

To over simplify the paradox of Holy Thursday, there is no resurrection without the Cross, no joy without sorrow. Before Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross, he cried out. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus is reciting the opening line of Psalm 22.

The psalm ends this way:
*For he has not spurned or disdained
the misery of this poor wretch,
did not turn away from me,
but heard me when I cried out.*

*I will offer praise in the great assembly,
my vows I will full fill before those who fear him
The poor will eat their fill;
Those who seek the Lord will offer praise.
May your hearts enjoy life forever!*

Though it begins with so much sorrow, Psalm 22 is a prayer that culminates in thanksgiving, praise, and joy with the promise of eternal life. It is a perfect summary of the Triduum. Let us welcome this gift that exists in the paradox of Holy Thursday. Out of betrayal and abandonment, Christ willing sacrifice creates a pathway for our thanksgiving, praise, joy, and healing through his Presence.

May we live out in our own lives the events and the meaning of Holy Thursday so that we can become who we receive. Praise God for the Eucharist and the opportunity for each of us to approach our Lord in his humble Presence.

Matthew Chicavich teaches religion and physics at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and four children. He has a masters degree in theology and a bachelor's degree in physics.

The Good Friday Funeral

By Thomas Griffin

Were you there when they tortured and killed God? For many Catholics, Good Friday is unlike any other day of the year. From a young age we are told about this serious and somber day when Jesus was brutally beaten and killed. God became one of us, and the response of humanity was to murder Him. On this day, humanity showed its ugliness and God showed His reckless love.

As a young boy, I vividly remember going to the Stations of the Cross and the 3:00pm service at my parish. My parents commitment to taking the family to these opportunities for prayer are among the most formative moments in my faith life. There was something different about them. Every Sunday we would go to Mass, say our prayers, and go home for a relaxing Sunday. People at Mass appeared to be praying but it seemed more routine than anything else.

Good Friday was different. It felt like I was attending God's funeral.

I remember seeing Catholics of all ages walk around the church property in silence reflecting on what it would have been like to be there as Jesus was condemned, whipped, spat on, and nailed to the wooden beams of the cross. As we walked around the parish campus we would sing, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Writing those words transports me back to what it feels like to reflect on the death of Jesus on Good Friday. It is like we are at his funeral. The difference between this day and any other funeral is that we have the opportunity to actually make contact with the power of Jesus' cross. We can unleash its power in our lives if we see that he endured all of that in order to set us free from our sinful ways. Christ's bloodied face looks at you on this day and says, "I did this all for love of you."

The 3:00pm service in the church brought all of these feelings to another level. It begins in silence. The priests enter the sanctuary and prostrate themselves on the ground. They lay face down in complete abandonment to Christ because 3:00pm is the moment when he died. As they do so, the people kneel in reverence and adoration of the cross.

Catholics are concrete. We depend on the physicality of faith because God became one of us and saved us through physical ways. The humiliation and pain that Jesus endured on Good Friday is, in many ways, unimaginable. This year, on Good Friday, immerse yourself in what it would have been like to actually view Christ's torture. Make this day different, because it is. This is the day that Christ was killed, but if you look closely and catch a glimpse of his beaten face - you'll see it is also the day of God's ultimate victory.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.

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Holy Saturday: The Grace of Waiting

By Louis Cicalese

"All things are passing; God never changes; Patient endurance attains all things." -Saint Teresa of Ávila

My wife is a profound theologian. She does not know it, but she is. She has never read any Karl Rahner or mastered Koine Greek, but her theological insights are equal parts subtle and sublime. She is not a systematic metaphysician, nor a biblical exegete or a moral philosopher. I would not even classify her as a pastoral theologian. She is the most important type of theologian our Church and world so desperately need - a practical, steadfast, and loving communicator of the Word made flesh and a model of waiting achingly for Holy Saturday to become Easter.

Over the past year and a half my family and I have been on a kind of Triduum journey. About two years ago I was afflicted with an extended and horrific bout of mania followed by an equally extended, but more horrific bout of depression. I was forced to take a leave from work. I am no Job. I am no Jesus. This lengthy Good Friday for me and my family was most certainly rooted in personal deficiency and sin, an unresolved and complicated history from my family of origin, and plain old inscrutable mental health issues and brain chemistry.

My wife and my two beautiful daughters did nothing to deserve the darkness that invaded our house and our relationships. She did for me what I could not do for myself. She called insurance companies; she found Retrouvaille, a Catholic marriage retreat; she found me a psychiatrist; she came to appointments; she encouraged me to find a therapist. Most importantly she cared for, loved, and protected our daughters beyond all measure and tried to normalize an obviously abnormal and traumatizing reality.

When my own despair burrowed deep into my heart. I anticipated a life of being unemployable, unlovable, and alone. I assumed that this was the end of my career and most likely the end of my marriage. I was in the tomb. I was dead. The darkness had dimmed even more. It was Holy Saturday.

An often overlooked and underappreciated part of our creeds profess the belief in the death of Jesus. "He suffered death and was buried." "He was crucified, died, and was buried." Jesus died a real human death. We are not docetists or gnostics. Jesus did not play a human on TV. He did not pretend to die. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, truly died. The Sacred Heart stopped beating when he was placed in the tomb. The enemy of human nature began to celebrate his victory. The dedicated Apostles scattered in fear and even St. Peter himself denied knowing Jesus.

With Our Lord in his tomb, all despaired, save for his Most Blessed Mother. My tomb was the couch. I barely moved or spoke. I assumed all had despaired of any recovery for me. Looking back on it now I was cadaverous, a corpse-like black hole pulling any joy or light from our home and our family into myself. I could not even pray. I preferred sleep to anything else because it was a small respite from the mental and emotional emptiness. At least in my nightmares I moved and spoke. Life became death. I was expecting the wake to be over soon, for the mourning of the old Lou to cease and for the inevitable end to everything I knew and loved to come.

My wife never despaired, even when she had nothing left in the tank. She imitated the Virgin. Slowly, miraculously, and unexpectedly I began to feel better. I do not pretend to know how, but I do believe when I found the energy to simply pray a few rote Hail Marys in the morning, I sensed a change. This is no bootstrap Pelagian story by any means. I was raised from the tomb. I did not, and I could not raise myself from the tomb. My recovery is all one big gift, a grace in the truest sense.

I know women of lesser character and upbringing, women of lesser faith and fortitude would have left and run away from the tomb. My wife did not. She stood vigil in the knowledge that all things are passing away.

My wife reminds me of the mother of Our Lord in so many ways, but her ability to wait, to trust that Jesus will do the right thing conjures up images of Our Lady of Cana. Mary notices the problem before the couple has a chance to be embarrassed and tells Jesus “They have no wine” (John 2:3). The stone water jars were empty. There was nothing left in the tank. Like Mary, my wife let Jesus know and waited for him to act. Mothers usually know best and we ought to listen to them. The Blessed Virgin famously tells the waiters to “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). And what does Jesus tell them to do? “Fill the jars with water” (John 2:7). That is it. He does nothing explicitly religious or sacramental. Jesus simply tells them to fill the empty stone jars with plain old water. He uses common matter and simple acts. When the waiters draw from the jars the unwitting head waiter tastes, and declares, “You have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10).

All we could do was try to fill our empty jars with common matter and simple acts. As we did, Jesus began to transform the water of my wife’s love and my meager prayer into the fine wine of recovery. I pray every day in gratitude for many things, but most of all for my wife and her everyday holiness. I pray that God has indeed saved the good wine until now and that the Holy Saturday that was lovingly permitted for some reason becomes rich compost in which to plant the seeds of the fruit that will nourish our marriage for the rest of this extended Easter together.

My wife taught me the theology of patient endurance and the trust that slavery becomes the passover, that exile becomes the return, that suffering ends, that the tomb will truly be empty, and that as Julian of Norwich once wrote, “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.

Louis Cicalese is a theology teacher at Regis High School in Manhattan and a parishioner of Curé of Ars in Merrick, where he lives with his wife and two daughters.



Easter is Everything

By Thomas Griffin

In 2020, I began to write more articles online for a few Catholic organizations. When COVID hit I jumped in head first to writing as a way to spend my time and reflect on the importance of faith in my own life. As I continued to do so, I wanted to create a space to store some of those writings. So, I attempted to make a website and decided on the name: The Empty Tomb Project.

In the summer of 2022, we launched the print magazine and not long after we became a non-profit organization. Since then, we have been blessed to enter over 30 churches on Long Island and our online presence continues to grow. Since then, we have printed over 13,000 copies and had over 9,500 downloads of the magazine from our website.

This history of our small writing entity is important for one reason: everything we do is about Easter, the empty tomb.

If Jesus Christ lived, preached, performed miracles, changed lives, claimed to be God, was killed and rose from the dead then our lives ought to be different. Suffering and pain are real for all of us. Everyone encounters their own Good Friday moments. We all know of the darkness that Holy Saturday brings because we experience it consistently in our own lives. Despite the darkness that this world can bring, the empty tomb offers the remedy.

God is real. Jesus is God and he rose from the dead two thousand years ago. The missing link to that last statement is that we can encounter Jesus as a real living person today. In our lives and especially through the Sacraments and the Eucharist we can meet Christ in a way that can alter our future. The victory of Easter is the answer because it is the proof that God, love, truth and hope will reign triumphant in our own lives and in the world.

What if he really is alive?

Being Catholic is not about a decision to be a part of the religion of our parents. It is not even about the obligation and responsibility to do what God commands us to do. Being Catholic is about falling in love with a God who was willing to do anything to get our attention and convey His love. That is why the empty tomb is the most important aspect of our Christian faith. Because He rose from the dead we can have a true relationship with Him today.

Without the resurrection of Jesus our faith is meaningless (1 Cor 15:14). Yes, because that would mean that Jesus was not God, but also because that would mean that we cannot have a relationship with him. When Jesus says that he will be with us always (Mt 28:20), he meant it literally. Because of the resurrection we have access to the same Jesus who changed the course of history two thousand years ago.

We believe that he actually rose from the dead. He was not a ghost and it was not a figment of the imagination of the early followers of Christ. His body was not found in his grave on the third day after his execution and he began to appear to his closest friends in profound ways. His appearances showed that he was alive and that he had defeated the forces of sin, evil and death. If we tap into the power of his resurrection we can live on earth as it is in heaven. We can live detached from sin and in the glory of the empty tomb.

The critical question is: How do we do that?

Through a devotion to the Eucharist, the Bible and personal prayer we can experience Jesus Christ today in a way that will move us at our core. This is what the early church did and this is why they were able to endure persecutions and trials. Their faith was not about being a country club member with people that are like-minded. It was not about cultural practices of Christmas or Easter or even the habit of attending Mass.

Their faith was a relationship with Jesus that defined their lives - their faith was radical because they believed that Jesus actually conquered death. Just like a man and woman who fall in love and begin to change their lives for one another, a true encounter with Christ leads one to alter their life in a way that aligns with his heart. This Easter, make a commitment to pray more each day. Set aside time to enter into silence and communication with the God of the universe who is truly alive and who desperately desires a deeper relationship with you.

Pick up one of the Gospels and commit to reading a chapter a day. Meditate on the daily Gospel of the day or begin reading some of the Psalms. Visit a church once a week, outside of Mass on Sunday, so that you can make contact with the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Reflect on what you can do to make yourself more aware of the fact that Christ truly is risen and alive today.

His body was never found. His grave was empty. Even two thousand years later, people claim to know Jesus and have a relationship with him. This is not the calling of the few but the invitation for each and every disciple. This is meant to be the "ordinary" Catholic's experience of faith. So, immerse yourself in the fact of the empty tomb and make a life connected to God the main project of your existence. Then, the light shining from his grave will invade our darkened world.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.

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