

Fear and Fasting

'The resurrection of Christ makes life a perpetual feast.' St. Athanasius

Real life provides many occasions for fear. As a parent, I am particularly in tune to threats upon my children's good. As they grow and face the 'free fall' of their own decision-making, Annette and I have feared for their good. Such fear focuses and fuels our prayers: 'O God, use this impasse, this accident, this strange relationship, this attitude, this addiction as an open door to Your new life.'

Last weekend my youngest son Sam graduated from college as a teacher. That marks the fourth and final college graduation of my kids. Sam took his time getting there. Our move to Kansas City nine years ago blew holes in his security and he lost ground. He faced more than a few dead-ends before he found Home. Jesus helped him through a group of faithful young adults. Sam has become an upright, dynamic young man and will make a great teacher. I am proud beyond words of his new life, which to me is founded on nothing less than resurrection.

Reflecting on our fight for his rising, I recall countless occasions where fear competed with faith. We could witness Sam's deception and desperation. Yet we could not save him from either. (We did insist he pay for his own idolatry.) So we waited and prayed and tried to help him when asked. Our hope bottomed out on several occasions but it was God who became the ever-deepening ground of our hope. That occurred wordlessly, without feeling. We were conscious of fear.

I take heart from the saints who had a hand in creating, preserving and proclaiming Jesus' life. The whole arc of His existence introduced fear into these mortal lives. So God, employing dreams and angels, was quick to speak: 'Mary, do not fear your favor--the new divine life emerging within you; Joseph, do not fear to protect this woman; she bears great favor.' (LK 1:30; Matt. 1:20)

The initial response to the resurrection was anything but clarity and assurance. Fear seemed to rule the day as an earthquake and intimidating angel scared the life out of the tomb guards ('they became like dead men' Matt. 28:4). Fright seized the two Marys who waited there so an angel exhorted them 'to not fear.' Working at it, 'the two hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell His disciples...' (Matt. 28:8).

I love that: 'afraid yet filled with joy', an apt reminder of how we feel toward loved ones whose action we cannot control and yet for whom we seek a rising. Jesus insists. He rose for everyone, and He beckons constantly to us to emerge from the tombs of limited vision and closed horizons. He opened that horizon: we pray that blind eyes might see it, and lame limbs walk towards it. Joy overtakes fear as we consider the magnitude of what He won for all in His Resurrection.

Last Saturday, all my kids gathered with Annette and me to celebrate Sam's graduation. We feasted on great food and strange humor and the faith common to us all. I could see the earmarks of new life—the horizon Jesus opened for each that each is discovering in his or her own way. On

such blessed occasions, we forget about fear; feasting and joy prevail.

'Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and now is found. So they began to celebrate.' (LK 15: 24)