

So, are you tired of snow yet? All the snow the last past few days reminded me of an experience from my seminary days at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago. While I was there several seminarians from East Africa entered the seminary. I knew Simon Peter from Uganda the best, but there were a couple guys from Tanzania as well. In any case, they enjoyed their first autumn in Chicago, but as the days passed, they got colder and colder. None of them had ever known a real winter before! The Rector of the seminary even had to take them shopping and buy them real winter coats. These poor guys were completely miserable.

But then I remember when the first snow began to fall. They had never seen snow before. I'm not sure if it was Simon Peter or one of the others, but he ran outside and began playing with this weird white stuff, experimenting with its texture, looking up into the sky, laughing. "It's snowing!" Maybe after this past week you can relate to those young men thousands of miles from Africa – of loving the strangeness and beauty of the snow in the midst of the cold.

Jesus and living His teaching well have that same mixture – even in the middle of suffering, there is this strange grace that can sustain joy in us. I want to go back to our second reading from I Corinthians. Paul tells those early Christians, “If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain . . . Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” Paul here wants to stress that Jesus really rose from the dead, body and soul. That’s the proof that we too can escape final death with Him. Paul is telling those new converts to the faith, “If Jesus’ body didn’t rise from the dead, if that’s a fable, or only a metaphor, then what are you doing even believing in all this? The faith I teach isn’t just about this life – it’s about forever, and it’s strange and shocking. Don’t try to explain and reduce Jesus to a size you can easily fit into your human ideas.”

The literal bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a foundational doctrine of the Church. The faith literally rises or fall on it. In other words, Christianity is about something really, really weird and wonderful – or it's about nothing much at all.

We life-long Catholics can forget that. We've lived with snow all our lives. It's no big deal. We've bundled ourselves against both the cold and the beauty. Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter? Yeah, so what? Well, the big deal is someone coming back from the dead – forever, never dying again, but able to eat with us, touch us, speak with us – that's a really big deal and it's really weird. Nobody else has ever done that. It's the center of our faith – and that means it should change everything about us. We should be dancing around, looking up at the sky, like anybody who had an encounter with such a weird thing. We should be live our lives acting like Simon Peter and his fellow Africans at their first sight of snow.

So, let's look at the Gospel. Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Plain are just as weird as we should expect from Someone who would one day soon rise for the dead. "Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those weeping," (and especially) "blessed are you when people hate you and exclude and insult you and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man . . . Rejoice and leap for joy! Your reward will be great in heaven." Very weird: as is His warning to the rich, satisfied, laughing and popular people, that their future is full of woe. That is not how the world thinks.

But what Jesus, and St. Paul, and the whole Tradition are saying is that there are two totally opposed ways of living, the way of the world and the Way of Jesus. One will get you a certain pleasure and acceptance in this life. The other will get you heaven forever. But they are mutually exclusive – and they won't make sense to one another. Just try living out the Gospel fully, and the world and everyone in it will think you are weird -- or worse.

But then remember that this world of Jesus' is a place where people rise from the dead, and the weeping laugh. And these God-filled lives of ours are much more beautiful, but weirder than we think, if we would only notice them and experience them as new snow. We can look at our faith as old snow – the kind we see outside today – melting in ugly, dirt encrusted heaps, rather than the pure magic of the falling flakes and winter wonderland look of its first fall. I bet most of you sometime during these days have even said, “Isn't it all beautiful?” even while grumbling about the drive or cabin fever.

Some questions for each of us today: Are we leading lives that seem weird in the eyes of those who don't know that Jesus rose from the dead? If the poor are blessed, then how much have we paid to follow Jesus? Does anyone exclude us, insult, or judge us because we're trying to live as Jesus teaches in the hope of rising from the dead as He did? And, if so, do we rejoice and leap for joy?

If our answer to those questions is “no,” then perhaps we’re not actually living His way yet, but are mostly living according to the world. If so, think about going to Dr. Mary Healy’s mission this Friday night and Saturday. You can still register online. Or attend the John Paul II Healing Center’s Friday and Saturday event here on April 5-6. Open yourself up more to conversion so as to see the joy, beauty, and power of the Holy Spirit, because living with Jesus means that even in the suffering of life there is the shocking, weird beauty that comes with living according to the truth taught by the Creator-King of this surprising world. And He is the source of our ever-lasting joy.