

3-23-08 Homily by Father Larry Covington Easter Sunday

I want to talk this morning about Easter as the ultimate manifestation of God's love. Let's talk about Diane, we'll use that name. Diane was every parent's worst fear. By her own account Diane grew up in a good and loving home. There were family outlines, birthday celebrations, softball, dance classes and church. But for some reason Diane never felt quite OK, and somewhere in high school things went really bad. There were drugs, stealing, alcohol, staying out late.

The family suffered social embarrassment and seemed increasingly in crisis – trying to reach out to Diane, while also struggling to maintain the family's life and values. There was counseling, and rehabilitation, and tough love, and tears and prayers. But the more they reached out to her, the more abusive and rebellious she became. Finally, she ran away, living a life she'd rather not talk about. She was well in her mid-to late-twenties before healing and reconciliation took place.

Diane said, “At first, I felt my parents’ love was unnecessary, it was smothering. Then eventually, as things got worse, I began to feel unlovable. I think I resented my parents most because if I was unlovable I could do what I wanted and it wouldn’t matter. But as long as I suspected I was loved I wasn’t free ‘to do my thing.’ So I needed to destroy their love in order for me to be free.”

“But,” she said, “They never stopped loving me, even when I got arrested and they refused to bail me out of jail, I could see the pain of love in their eyes. Now I realize how much I had needed their love; that it was probably their love and their prayers that kept me alive all those years. But when I look back on those years what amazes me most of all is that my worst could not destroy their love for me.” And this is what Easter is about for believers; it’s about God’s undefeated love for us. Because of Easter resurrection we know our worst cannot destroy the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Good Friday represents the worst that humanity can do. It represents our effort to destroy God's offering of love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Good Friday represents our rebellion against that gift. Quoting the Shema, Jesus taught, "Love God with all your heart, with all your affection, with all your mind and with all your soul (inner-being)." That is as hard today as it was in the first century.

A philosopher once said, "We are to use things and love people, but in our world we love things and use people." And when we feel like objects we treat others as objects; and we see commitment to God's love and commandments as entrapments; as death to our freedom. And so we give our loyalties and our affections to the very things that can rob us of our love and destroy us.

It's like Diane's rejection of her parents. Good Friday represents humanity's primal "NO!" And sometimes that "no" comes out of pain in our lives. Sometimes it comes out of a sense of unworthiness, or it may come as anger that God has not "bailed us

out.” Bailed us out of the dilemmas in our lives or prevented tragedy in our lives. Therefore, the loving, life-giving Lord is held up to our anger, our rejection, and our defiance. Good Friday represents our worst, for Jesus suffered not simply for our sins but because of our sins.

Now we don't all reject the love of God in the same way. My favorite author, Albert Camus, my favorite atheist wrote, for anyone who is without God and without a master, the weight of days is dreadful. Hence, one must choose a master, God being out of style.” The masters we choose in rejection of God's love are not always dastardly things like violence and drugs. The masters we choose may be perfectly honorable things such as professionalism, political activism –anything that consumes all of our attention and affection. Perhaps one of the most subtle is social correctness – living neat, disciplined, appropriate lives.

We are nice people with traditional American values. We give to charity, work hard at our professions, we volunteer, we car pool the neighborhood kids, socialize in the right circles and pay our

taxes. But our lives are so cluttered with “appropriateness” that there is no room for God. In fact, whether intentional or not, our lives seem to prove how unnecessary God actually is.

Our lives may even be traditional enough to occasionally include church. Look around you. This building hasn’t been this full since last Easter. And there we read words and sing music we adore but have long ceased to believe. And so for us Christ is not risen. He is entombed in the sepulchers of our apathy, which are adorned with the garlands of our politeness and our social appropriateness.

But Easter still represents the faithfulness of God’s enduring and steadfast love despite the worst we can inflict. It waits until, like Diane, we come to the place in our lives when we realize we need the fullness of God’s love. It waits until that moment when we realize that “the weight of days” is too dreadful without God; that the master we have chosen cannot give us peace or redemption.

It’s then, like the women at the first Easter, that we search the places where our faith has been entombed and hear the faithful voice of the loving God saying, “Why do you seek life among

things that are dead? My love for you is alive! Alleluia! Christ is Risen!”

Remember this: Easter is not just a holy event that happened 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem. It is a little Easter on whatever day we discover our need for the love of God. When we discover that all of the Good Fridays of our lives cannot destroy the love that God has for us. Today can be your Easter. Whether you are in your car or simply getting ready for Easter Celebration, if you are sensing a need for God’s love – for renewed faith, hope, for a sense of inner peace – know that the tomb in which you have buried your faith is now empty. It has been enlivened by the love of God which endures forever.

For to celebrate Easter, is to cease the struggle against the way of God and accept the love that we so long resisted, yet so deeply needed. For as St. Paul has said, “Nothing in death or life, in the present or the future, in this world or the world to come can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.”

To that I say Amen! Amen! What do you say? Where the spirit of the Lord is there is the one true church apostolic and universal at which we stand and confess our faith.