

ST. CECILIA HOMILY
Second Sunday of Easter

Well here we are at the end of the Easter Octave ~ a whole week since Easter Sunday and the finish of Lent. At our house the chocolate bunnies have been devoured. The plastic Easter eggs and baskets are back in storage. The telephone Easter grass has mostly been vacuumed up. And the 4th of July decorations are already in the stores. Where did it all go? Easter is gone and we haven't even had time to process Lent.

So what happened when Lent ended? Did we just throw up our hands and say, "Well, that's over for another year! We did it!" Or was Lent 2011 different? Was it a time of change? Real change? Did we become different people? Well, I lost 10 pounds, even though Fr. Jim reminds us that Lent is not the Catholic Church's Jenny Craig. Still, except to take in a notch on my belt, did I change in any other way?

Am I a different person because of the way I lived those 6 plus weeks? Lent is a journey that hopefully takes us forward and upward -- not just in a circle to be repeated again next year. Lent is not a bump in the road or a mudhole to plow through. It is part of our onward journey.

Lent helps us to get ready for what happens next - the Resurrection - Easter! After all, we are an Easter People. Our Lenten journey should have prepared and empowered us to celebrate like Easter people. Did it?

In his book, *Surprised by Hope*, author N.T. Wright suggests that if we are an Easter people and Jesus' resurrection is central to our faith, we should celebrate a whole lot more and a whole lot longer than we do. We should have parties, we should remember our baptism, we should do surprise acts of generosity that will embody Christ's new life filling the world. He says that our celebration of Easter should make the world around us ask, "What's the meaning of all this? Who are these joyfilled people?"

Certainly, any resurrection joy has faded for the disciples in today's gospel. On the evening of Easter Day, instead of celebrating they've gone into hiding and locked themselves away. That's not surprising. They no doubt fear that they are next-- that the people who came for Jesus will come looking for them. They are probably carrying some guilt too. After all, they had let Jesus down and failed in so many ways. All this changes when the risen Jesus comes to them with the words of, "Peace be with you." And then he shows them his hands and his sides -- signs of his mercy and love. Still later, he reaches out to the doubting Thomas and he believes.

Jesus doesn't leave the disciples engulfed in their fear, failure and seclusion. He gives them a mission when he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." The message is clear. You are an Easter people-- you can't keep my mission and message to yourselves. He commissions them to carry his work

into the world. Then Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" and they receive new life.

That same Spirit is breathed on us in the waters of our baptism. We too, despite our doubts, failings and shortcomings, are an Easter people and given life by the Spirit. We, too, are commissioned to go out into a world that desperately needs joy, peace and forgiveness and share our Easter joy. We are reminded that we are an Easter people not just for a week, not just for the 50 days of Easter from Easter Sunday to Pentecost, but through all the seasons of the year.

Deacon Gary Aitchison
April 30 - May 1, 2011