

## A Spiritual Easter Basket

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

How many people woke up to an Easter Basket this morning?

When we were children, we would wait to see what the Easter Bunny brought to us. That Easter Bunny is good. How many had actually to search for their Easter baskets this morning? What are some of the things that came in your Easter basket?

From where did we get the whole idea of an Easter Basket and Easter Bunny? As we know, Easter is a celebration of spring and new life. Eggs and flowers are rather obvious symbols of female fertility, but in European traditions, the bunny, with its amazing reproductive potential, is not far behind. Germans brought the tradition from Europe where accounts as far back as the 1600s in Germany describe children hunting for Easter eggs much like children in the US do today. You see, the Easter Bunny has been around for a long time. And Easter eggs are symbolic of new life. We will talk about how Christians have incorporated that new life in just a moment.

What about us in 2024? We know that children's Easter Baskets have changed, but what would we like? If I had an Easter basket, I would want gift certificates to restaurants, a spa day, and maybe some Red Sox tickets for a June game. I wonder, though, how many of us have thought about a spiritual Easter basket?

The concept of a spiritual Easter basket would be one that is filled with the Easter gifts we have received from God. What would be in our Spiritual Easter Basket? God has certainly gifted us with faith. On one hand, we can say that the Resurrection strengthens our faith. We cannot say that God's will causes everything that happens. The same God behind the creation of the universe is at work even now, wherever there is crisis or sorrow or pain. God is at work bringing comfort, hope, and resurrection.

Not only does the Resurrection strengthen our faith, but it also gives us hope. Hope has to be in our Spiritual Easter basket. It gives us the hope that we are redeemed. You see, after Jesus' death, the apostles were hidden, shaking in their sandals behind bolted doors and shuttered

windows. The faithful women, rising early that first dawn of what would become the new Sabbath, went to a cemetery expecting to find the body of Jesus. What they found was a messenger of God. Grief turned to fear and wonder. Could it be that Jesus was alive? Is that what he had meant when he spoke of rising on the third day?

For us, the Easter Resurrection allows us to find our hope for eternal life with God through Christ. This is what gives us hope as we go through our lives. It is what gives me hope as I approach “old age” and what I jokingly and lovingly call “the fourth quarter” of life. There are days that I think that halftime hasn’t happened yet, but I digress. It is this hope to spend eternity with God through Christ that allows me to not be afraid of what happens when the clock says 0:00 and we are not going into overtime. Hope is a great gift to have in our Spiritual Easter basket. We have this gift of hope because the Resurrection also gives us grace.

The good news of Easter comes on the wings of grace. The gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus and the appropriation of the grace provided there—is the result of God’s grace; it is nothing we have

to claim as right. However, grace is indeed a gift. God's grace brought about Easter, God's grace preaches Easter, and God's grace alone can stir human hearts to believe and accept the good news of the Resurrection. The gifts of faith, hope, and grace are all given to us out of an overabundance of love for us by God.

We have spent the last two years talking about God's love for us. We devoted our Season of Lent/Season of Love to ways that we can embrace this love. It is the same love that Jesus showed his disciples and followers at the Resurrection. It is the same love that Jesus shows Mary Magdalene when he speaks to her in John's Gospel. It is the same love that God shows to us as the only Son is killed and then brought to new life in the Risen Christ. This is all done out of love for us, love for humanity throughout the ages, and the love that will continue to the end of time. It is in this love that we gather here this Easter morning to be with our church community to remember, celebrate, and believe in the power of God through the Resurrection.

Our spiritual Easter basket looks just awesome with its gifts of faith, hope, grace, and love. Of course, the greatest of these is love.

Revel in the great gifts we have been given. Let the fifty day celebration—a love fest with God—begin this day and continue in our hearts through our prayers and actions.

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