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Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Arlington, VA

Pat and NCAA. Many people frequently ask what I do when I am not here at OLQP. One of my responsibilities is to lead the seminarians in their formation and development as future priests in our Church. An important responsibility, I think. Imagine my dilemma when one of our seminarians presents me with a tough question. An avid basketball fan, he has been given tickets to the opening rounds of the NCAA Championship Tournament games here in DC. The problem is that they conflict a bit with our observance of the solemnity of these holiest days of the year. What is a seminary rector to do (especially one who is a bit jealous that he can't go himself)? With his assurance that he would do his best to pray and honor the reverence of these days, I permitted him to enter into the mystery of March Madness. And, boy did he. As of this morning, he has no voice, looks like he has been up for at least 48 hours, and has been keeping vigil in a Madison Square Garden of Gethemane. No matter how many times he showers, I think his hair is permanently damaged from prolonged hours of wearing his USD baseball cap too long and too tight. He spent his Holy Triduum with most of our country. I think I am questioning my decision; I will guide him to the chapel when I am done Mass, don't worry.

But, March Madness is not limited to college basketball. In fact, there are real signs of real madness around us:

Economy: EJ Dionne. Never do I want to hear again from my conservative friends about how good capitalists are. How much they deserve their seven-figure salaries and how government should keep their hands off private economy. The Wall Street titans have turned into a bunch of welfare clients. Enter the federal government, the institution to which the wealthy are not supposed to pay capital gains or inheritance taxes. Good God, you don't expect these people to turn in their BMWs for their Saturns, do you?

Election Cycle: From the \$1 billion dollars that will be spent before the general election even kicks off to the talk of black preaching in the black Church of our first viable black candidate, we are a bit off-centered with the future of our country. Can't we see the call to convert rage over race into understanding so that two polarized races can become one human community, the human race that God made us, just in a few different beautiful colors?

Spitzer Scandal: During the great season of forgiveness, we once preoccupy ourselves with infamous sexual sins of the famous.

War—Just this week on the feast of the gentle St. Joseph during this Holy Week, we marked the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our unnecessary, unjust war that is going on far too long.

How can we possibly take a break for one day of Easter, no less 50 days? This is the call of Easter. Are we so preoccupied with so many different March Madnesses that we cannot celebrate March gladness? The March Gladness that is Easter!!!

And, Easter tells us that we are wired for God, for gladness, and not for madness of any sort.

Our Easter vocation and Easter identity calls us to proclaim a great message not on what we see, but on what we experience. Let's just look at our gospel characters:

Mary Magdalene: She is so disappointed not just because she is on her way to pray before her dead friend, but because she is going to the place of her dead hope. Yet, something happens to her while "it's still dark." Something happens to her inside. It is not what she sees; it is what she experiences, based on her TOTAL experience and relationship with this person Jesus.

The beloved disciple: Just a few hours before, he was at the foot of the cross, wailing and despairing. Now, he peers into the empty cave. He sees nothing and believes. No one know what he believed, but we know what he saw: NOTHING.

Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple say YES when they could have said NO. They say YES to mystery based on the LOVE they experienced from the man they can't see. They say YES to all of life, to everything that is possible. Remember, how Luke begins his story of Jesus' life: All things are possible for God.

March gladness: Saying yes to all of life letting all of it in. That is festivity's sustaining source, but there is the rub: So few of can say yes to anything for very long. We live, after all, in an intensely mobile culture of fast food, faster cars, disposable diapers, and planned obsolescence. Our greatest goal, as Andy Warhol once quipped: to be famous for 15 minutes.

At parties we do not carry on conversations, we posture—repeating to one another snippets from dialogues in movies, beer commercials, sitcoms or interviews with sport celebrities. Small wonder that many in our society feel so isolated and lonely, so unable to connect, so incapable of forming relationships that last, small wonder, too, that as a people we find ourselves bored, angry, and violent—enraged and terrified by the awful emptiness that seems to stretch in every direction around us. Given such cultural conditions the Christian celebration of Easter will strike many as mad indeed.

Fifty days of dwelling in the paschal mystery! Fifty days of surrounding ourselves in joyful faith and love as the Spirit of God takes possession of our lives! Fifty days of mystygy of walking with the neophytes ever more deeply into the baptismal mysteries of death and resurrection. One reason why such a prolonged celebration strikes us difficult, if not down right absurd, is that we tend to link feasts and holidays with

mindless hoopla. “Party time,” for many, is an invitation to obliterate consciousness, to get wasted, to veg out, to forget.

But a season of Christian festival is precisely the opposite. A great theologian Nathan B. Mitchell said it best: “It is a time of intensified consciousness, finely tuned awareness, awakened memory. The great fifty days of Easter are not an unwelcome, unrealistic obligation to “party on,” even if we don’t feel like it, but an invitation to explore more deeply the “weather of our heart,” to awaken our memory of God’s presence and power in our lives, to look more closely at all the rich and varied textures of creation. In short, Easter is a season for learning how to say yes in a culture that wants to keep on saying no.”

Dear Church of the Resurrection, March Madness ends on Monday, April 7, but March gladness never ends, because today we know that we live for ever and ever!!!