

Year B, April 1, 2018
Easter Sunday
Christ Church, Mexia

Alleluia, Christ is risen! It's good to be able to say alleluia again!

In my younger days, one of my favorite authors was Eric Hoffer. Mr. Hoffer was an interesting person. The son of German immigrants, he was blinded at age 7 by an earlier fall down the stairs, but his sight inexplicably returned at age 15, so he had no formal schooling. He began to read voraciously when he received his eyesight again and became self-educated. Having lost both of his parents when he was young, he spent several years on skid row in LA, and as a migrant farm worker and gold prospector. For most of his life, and beginning in 1943, he worked as a stevedore on the San Francisco docks. Still he authored 10 books and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1983 for his contributions.

Though I was intrigued and impressed by most of what he wrote, I can't say that I always agreed with him. He was an atheist and referred to religion as the opiate of the masses. While I agree that religion can and does have a calming effect, I, of course, see more value in religion than he did. In his first book, *The True Believer*, published in 1951, he looked at mass movements in history, both religious and political. In part, he posits that true believers are ready to die for a cause. Admittedly, in my younger years I believed that, if necessary, I should be ready to die (give my life) for a cause, whether it be religious belief or values (God) or freedom (country). But as I matured, I came to understand that my Christianity does not require my physical death, in the way we think of life and death, but rather to die to self. In other words, to try as rigorously as I can to put others first by living, loving and serving others.

We have completed the seemingly long journey of Lent, culminating in Good Friday. Those of you who were here on Friday clearly felt the emotional strain of walking through the events of the Passion of our Lord. To briefly recall, especially for those unable to be with us, the Rev. Frank Logue describes these events from the point of view of the powers of that day: "In purely human terms, the story of the would-be Messiah from Nazareth in Galilee has come to a brutal end. For the Roman colonial government, Jesus is a minor statistic, yet another Jewish revolutionary crucified in Rome's ongoing efforts to preserve peace in Palestine. The ringleader, Jesus, has been publicly and cruelly killed. His disciples have vanished for fear of a similar fate. For the keepers of the status quo, this has been a successful Passover festival. Jesus' movement is buried with its leader." But the story didn't end there! That is the wonderful and exciting revelation of today!

In his Easter message, sent from the Holy Land, our Presiding Bishop, Michael, said: "The truth is the message of Jesus was unsettling to the world then as it is unsettling to the world now. And yet that very message is the only source of hope in life for the way of the cross, the way of unselfish living, the way of sacrificial living, seeking the good, the welfare of the other before one's own unenlightened self-interest. That way of the cross is the way of love. That is the nature of love. And that way is the only hope for the entire human family.

The reality is (-) the way of Jesus (i)s a threat to the way the world is, and hope for the way the world can and will be.

But on the third day after the crucifixion, when by the titanic power of God, by the power of the love of God, Jesus was raised from the dead. God sent a message and declared that death does not have the last word. Hatred does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Bigotry does not have the last word. Sin (and) evil do not have the last word. The last word is God, and God is love."

And the goal of being filled with God's love is not to possess it for ourselves, but rather to give it away to others. Now you may think, do I have the desire and ability to do that? So, let me share something Br. David Vryhof, SSJE, wrote: "I remember when I was in college, I worked with children who had special needs. And I remember one evening being at supper and watching a young boy who was struggling to cut a piece of meat, but his hands lacked the strength and coordination to be successful in the task. And finally, he looked up and asked for help. ...one of the staff members came around behind him, wrapped her arms around his, put her hands over his, and helped him cut the meat. And I thought that was an apt image for our relationship with God. When we realize that we can do nothing on our own, that we are dependent on God's life and strength within us, then we yield ourselves to that strength, and God's strength becomes one with our strength, so that we can't tell where our strength leaves off and where God's strength begins. It all becomes one." God loves us and is always with us, sustaining and helping us, arms around us!

With all due respect to Eric Hoffer, I am sorry that his life did not afford him the opportunity to understand the true meaning of today. Through Jesus' life we are better able to understand God and how God wants us to live, through Jesus' death we can be reconciled to God, and through his resurrection we can have life eternal with God. God has removed all obstacles through Jesus; we can be one with God.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!