

Easter

I'd like to tell you about my cousin Steve. Steve was born a few months after I was, but he lived in Minnesota, so I rarely got to see him. Even though he came from a family of 3 children and I came from a family of 6, I always thought that Steve was more my cousin than anyone else's because we were the same age. When I entered a high school seminary in Kansas City, Steve entered a high school seminary in Minnesota. One day during senior year my mother came to me in tears. She said that Steve had a serious illness, a brain tumor, and he would have surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Now, I'm not very proud of this, but when I was a high school senior I rarely hugged my mother; I thought I was too grown up for that. But that day we hugged.

Steve survived the surgery, but he spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He could speak, but not very clearly. Many people assumed that Steve was mentally disabled. He wasn't. He was very sharp. His family became interested in the rights of persons like Steve. My uncle got a job for a company that made products for persons with physical disabilities. Steve became a rights advocate in the State of Minnesota. He died a few years ago, his body weakened by years of ill health. But Steve made life better for persons who lived as he did. This never would have happened if he hadn't gotten sick as a high school senior. When his family received bad news that day, they didn't look down, they looked up.

The first disciples of Jesus faced the same choice. After receiving bad news that he had died on the cross, they could either look down or look up. With his resurrection, they made good things happen. They spread the message of Christ far and wide.

It wasn't easy. Take the Colossians, for example. They had left their former way of life, found hope in the testimony of Christians, faced scorn from members of their families and friends, and still chose to be baptized. Paul told them this is how they should live: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above.... Think of what is above, not of what is on earth." The Colossians could no longer look down. In their work, their play, and their study, they did everything looking up toward the will of Christ.

My brothers and sisters, on this Easter Day we rise with Christ. On Ash Wednesday we expressed sorrow for our sins. We confessed that too often we have looked down. We worried about ourselves, our comfort, and our happiness. We did not look around to the needs of other people or up to the will of God. Ash Wednesday is a day of bad news.

But today is Easter. Christ is risen for us. We have done penance and sacrifice. We know from our experience of this Lent that we can be better people. Because of Lent, we can better tend the sick and bury the dead. We can feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. We can share our clothing and take care of the earth. We can welcome the stranger and practice peace. We can do all of this more easily because Christ is risen and we are looking up. There are plenty of people like the first disciples and like my cousin Steve, who received bad news and found good news. You have done it too. Because of your sacrifice this Lent, you are ready to look up and make the world a better place.