

## Easter Sunday

Cock-a-doodle-doo is the closest the English language comes to imitating the crow of a cock at dawn. The most beautiful rooster of all was Chanticleer, named for his silvery voice. On April 1, or a month later depending on how you read Chaucer, Chanticleer encountered a fox. Chanticleer became afraid because of a recent nightmare that a fox would kill him, but his favorite wife had scolded him for being superstitious. When the fox praised Chanticleer for his handsome appearance and beautiful voice, the rooster showed off and sang, extending the full length of his throat. The fox instantly clamped its jaws on Chanticleer's throat and ran out of the barnyard to enjoy his feast. The other animals fruitlessly gave chase. From the jaws of death Chanticleer told the fox he should turn around to the flagging animals and boast about his victory. The fox approved this idea, stopped running, turned around, opened its mouth to boast, and Chanticleer escaped, flying into a tree. The fox fooled the proud rooster, and the rooster fooled the proud fox. Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale is one candidate for the origins of a day we call April Fool's.

We began Lent this year on Valentine's Day. Easter has arrived on April Fool's. Holy Thursday was the Royals home opener; enough said about that. Good Friday is in some way another Valentine's Day because, as St. John wrote, on that day Jesus loved his followers to the end. It felt weird on February 14 to join excessive gifts of Valentine love with the restrictive disciplines of Lenten fast. But it feels quite jolly to celebrate Easter on April Fool's Day. Chaucer's tale reveals how much trouble our sins can bring to ourselves, especially the sin of pride. It also shows how the rooster fell into the clutches of death unawares, yet escaped. Jesus, however, entered death fully aware. He did not escape dying; he escaped death after dying. The rooster made an April Fool of the fox. Jesus made an April Fool of death.

Psalm 118, today's responsorial, uses an inanimate metaphor: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." At the time it was composed, people sang this psalm at the harvest festival to commemorate the favors God had bestowed on Israel. Israel was not powerful; other nations had mightier force. Enemies treated Israel as a builder disregards a stone. But God favored Israel above all the others in fruitfulness, faith and fidelity. In the eyes of God, the rejected stone became the cornerstone.

Jesus applied Psalm 118 to himself after telling a parable near the end of his life. Peter made the same comparison in Acts of the Apostles, and it reappears in the First Letter of Peter: Jesus, rejected, has become the cornerstone. Jesus tricked his enemies, unbelievers and death itself. We can imagine him at his arrest singing another verse from the same psalm: "I shall not die but live anew."

Each of us can recall times when our pride got us into trouble, when we believed we had all the answers and all the power, when we could provide the leadership that nobody else could, when we could live without relying on God. We've all suffered pride. Every rooster here has encountered a fox that brought us back to reality. Today we encounter someone else, the Son of God, who emerges from his tomb at cockcrow. He shouts to those who put him there, "April Fool's". And we shout back, "I believe."

Sunday, April 1, 2018