

After a long, hard winter, spring really feels good. At times we wondered if we would ever see grass or sun again. But the earth has turned, and we are refreshed.

Many of us have also endured a long, hard Lent. You have reduced your food and drink. You have prayed more. You have done good deeds for members of your family, neighbors and strangers. You have shifted your attitudes. A good Lent is a hard Lent, because it puts us in touch with our addictions, our preferences, our pride, and our sin. We experience a conversion from who we were on Ash Wednesday to who we are on Easter.

One guy who went through a great conversion before and after Easter was Saint Peter. The most headstrong of the apostles, the natural leader, he was also the one who denied Jesus three times on the night before the crucifixion. But here he is in today's first reading, preaching about Jesus with complete confidence and skill. A guy who continually put his foot in his mouth now puts his life on the line, all because of the first Easter Day.

Peter is giving this speech in the house of a Gentile. At first, the apostles had to figure out whether Jesus had come only for the salvation of Jews or for the Gentiles as well. Cornelius the Gentile had heard about Jesus and wanted to know more. Peter was reluctant to go, but God gave him a vision to reassure him that Jesus had come for everyone. So Peter visited Cornelius, his family and his servants. Peter summarizes the whole gospel in a few lines: John baptized Jesus, God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, Jesus healed those oppressed by the devil and worked other great deeds; and his enemies put him to death, Peter says, "by hanging him on a tree" – using an interesting word for the cross, a word that recalls the tree in the Book of Genesis, the place of the first sin. Peter says of Jesus, "This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible not to all the people, but to us. . . . He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead." You have to wonder what Peter thought about that part: Jesus was appointed to be judge of the living and the dead. Peter knew his own faults and his own sins, and that Jesus knew them as well. Still, he seems to have no fear about the judgment of Christ because he has also experienced the love of Christ. In fact, Peter concludes his speech by saying "that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Today as we look back over the past six weeks, no matter how well or poorly we observed Lent, we have a pretty good idea of our sins. We know where we fail to love God first above all else; where we have failed to love our neighbor for whom we should care, and where we have failed to love even ourselves. We carry our sins like a hard, cold winter inside us, freezing us from reaching out to others, burying our true selves like flowers in the snow. This Easter Day comes to us like the spring. We experience the warm healing rays of the rising Son of God. So if today we know our shortcomings, let us also know this good news, that everyone who believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins through his name.