

A poor widow had three very successful sons. They each decided to make her 80th birthday something special. The first son presented her with a newly-built expensive home. The second son gave her a Mercedes and a chauffeur. The third son, however, knew his mother would appreciate something spiritual, not material. After many difficult negotiations, he bought an unusual parrot from a monastery; the monks had spent 12 years training this bird to recite the entire bible. Whatever chapter and verse you call out, the parrot would give the correct quote. The mother received these gifts and sent notes to each of her sons. To the first, she said, "I received the house. It's huge. I live in one room and I spend all day cleaning the others." To the second, she said, "I received the car. But I don't drive anymore and the chauffeur is rude." To the third she wrote, "You are the only one of my children who knew what I really wanted. Thank you. The chicken was delicious."

Passover calls for the sacrifice of a lamb, not of a parrot, and when Saint Paul speaks of this in his first letter to the Corinthians, he says, "For our paschal lamb, Christ has been sacrificed." According to John's gospel, Jesus was put to death at Passover, so when the lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple, he was hanging on the cross. Today our celebration of Easter usually happens near the Jewish celebration of Passover, but not this year; the days are a month apart. We calculate the date of Easter this way: It falls on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. Spring began on Thursday. We had a full moon on Friday. So today is Easter. If you think Easter is early this year, you're right. March 23rd is the second-earliest date that Easter can possibly be. It will fall on March 22nd, but don't hold your breath; that won't happen until the year 2285 – over 250 years from now. The latest Easter can be is April 25th. That will happen in the year 2038, just 30 years from now, in case you want to mark your calendar.

Passover calls for lamb, and it also calls for unleavened bread. On the first Passover, the Israelites fled so quickly from the clutches of Pharaoh in Egypt that they didn't wait for the dough to rise. Saint Paul talks about this, too. Yeast is an instrument of organic corruption, so it became a symbol of evil in the Jewish-Christian tradition. Paul says we should respond to the sacrifice of Christ by throwing out corruption – get rid of the yeast – from our lives and living on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

My brothers and sisters, we have passed over Lent, our season of renewal. We have reflected on the sin that corrupts our lives. We stand ready to throw it out, so that we may be filled with sincerity and truth. Today we renew our baptismal promises. When we do, let us truly reject Satan and his influence, and truly fix our hearts on God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who forgives our sins and raises us up from death to life.