

Easter makes sense of life

Holy Week and Easter, with their powerful story of death and resurrection, are especially poignant this year. In a period of just over a month, three priests of the Archdiocese of Baltimore have died: Father Chris Carney (whom I have already written about), Father Wayne Funk, pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick, and Monsignor Jim Cronin, founding pastor of St. Isaac Jogues in Carney.

Father Chris Carney had his gentle, quiet way of pastoring. Father Wayne Funk was equally effective, but not quite as quiet! He had a laugh for the ages. Monsignor Jim Cronin had the great Irish wit. I never heard anyone say a single negative thing about either of them, much like the late Monsignor Ed Echle.

When I think of these three men I think of the tens of thousands of lives they touched. I think of the countless hours spent planning and celebrating the Holy Week and Easter liturgies.

On this earthly plane, in this world of form, their passage is greatly mourned. Father Chris' gentle style, forever gone. Father Wayne's booming laugh forever silenced. Monsignor Jim's Irish wit and wisdom never to be experienced here again.

Only Easter makes sense of life. Without a belief in life after death, life is exactly what Shakespeare said it was: "Sound and fury, signifying nothing." The psalms capture a similar poignant picture: "Man's days are like the flowers. The wind blows and he is gone, and his place knows him no more." Or, as Monsignor Jack Ballard was fond of repeating: "Nothing deader than a dead priest!" Most humans live on in their families, in the lives of children and grandchildren. The priest leaves no such family.

In a sense, this is the ultimate basis of celibacy. It's a statement of profound faith in the resurrection of the dead. We do not live on in the lives of those we leave behind. We believe that we literally live on!

Various books have been written to 'prove' that Jesus was married. One such book argued that in the research done, there could not be found a single Jewish rabbi who was not married! Therefore, Jesus must have been married!

But we believe Jesus was clearly not married, for precisely the same reason mentioned above. God entered history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth precisely to model faith in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus was not resuscitated, but risen. His was not a continued human existence that would eventually end in mortal death. His resurrection was precisely a glorified existence, a life never to end.

Father Chris, Father Wayne and Monsignor Jim gave their lives to proclaim the core message of the church: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." They thought Christ was worth giving their life for. Christ believed that they were worth giving eternal life to!

If you are a young man, or if you know a young man, who might be wondering what God wants you to do with your life, you could do worse than to call upon these three men, now advocates for us in the presence of God.

Perhaps you might utter some simple prayer such as: "Father Chris, Father Wayne, Monsignor Jim, from your place in heaven help me in my journey of faith on earth. Help me to know what is God's will for me. Help me to do it."

For some of you that will be a call to priesthood. If you hear that call, then I encourage you to call your local parish or Father Gerard Francik (410-547-5354). You will be following in the footsteps of great, but humble, men. And then your life will inspire others to want to follow in the footsteps of Christ. That's how the priesthood has been passed on from generation to generation over these past 2,000 years. It will only end when we come to that eternal Easter that we call eternal life.