

Lessons on the meaning of Easter

By Father Joseph Breighner

On Holy Saturday night, Johnny asked his mother if he could go to bed early. His mother asked him if he was sick, but he said he was only tired. Actually, he didn't think he could tell his mother the real reason. He wanted to go to bed early so he could get up early to meet the Easter Bunny.

The next morning it happened just as planned.

As Johnny hid behind the bushes in his front yard, he saw a tall figure in white coming up the sidewalk. Johnny jumped out and exclaimed: "Wow, you must be the Easter Bunny!"

"And you must be Johnny," came the reply.

"How do you know my name and how come you can talk?" Johnny asked.

"Well, I know your name because I know my route pretty well," the figure said. "If I'm good at this I might get a mail route. I can talk because I might get arrested for breaking and entering. Now tell me what you are doing here."

"I just wanted to ask you some questions, but mostly I wanted to know why you do this," the boy said.

The tall figure looked perplexed.

"You mean, you've never heard of Jesus?" he asked the boy.

"Oh, I've heard of him, but going to church can be pretty boring and I don't always understand," Johnny said.

"Wow," replied the visitor, "Jesus was certainly not boring. He could talk all day and tell stories and people never got bored. Some people were jealous of all the good he was doing, so they plotted against him and had him killed."

"That's a sad story" Johnny said. "I don't like it."

"But it had a happy ending," the visitor said. "Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back from the dead, and that's why we have Easter eggs and jelly beans – special food for a special day."

"How do we know he came back from the dead?" Johnny wondered.

"Several people saw him that morning," the figure said. "One was a girl named Mary. She was special to Jesus."

"I don't like girls" Johnny said. "My big sister picks on me."

"Then Mary ran to tell Peter," the visitor said.

"Who was Peter?" asked Johnny.

"Peter was a tough guy when Jesus was alive," the figure replied. "He said he'd fight anyone who tried to hurt Jesus. But when Jesus was arrested, Peter ran away. But Jesus forgave him when he came back from the dead. He said that just because he made one mistake, his whole life wasn't a mistake. Peter spent the rest of his life telling everyone about Jesus."

"I don't understand" said Johnny. "Why do people talk about rabbits on Easter and not about Jesus?"

"Well," said the tall figure in white, "people have never been able to figure out God. Maybe they find it easier to believe in rabbits delivering baskets than in someone rising from the dead. Maybe when you grow up, you'll tell stories too. But stories fade away. And Easter bunnies fade away. But Jesus lives on. He lives to tell people who think no one loves them, that he loves them. He lives to tell people who have no hope that there is hope. He lives to tell people that even dying is not the end, but only the beginning – the beginning of something so wonderful that we can't even dream how wonderful it is."

He reached out and patted Johnny's shoulder, until Johnny realized it was his mother's hand.

"Hey," the mother said. "Are you going to sleep forever? Wake up. It's Easter!"

"You mean it was only a dream?" asked Johnny.

"What was only a dream?" she asked.

"I don't know," Johnny said. "I thought I was talking to the Easter Bunny, but I guess I met Jesus instead!"