



Our Lord

*has written the
promise of the
resurrection...
in every leaf
in spring-time.*

The Lord liveth;
and blessed be my rock;
and let the God of my
salvation be exalted.

PSALM 18:46



Feast of the Epiphany and Beyond,

Dear Family and Friends,

This breaks all of the earlier "late date Epiphany letters." Maybe by reading the rest of the letter and by noticing that the flowers on the cover are white Easter lilies rather than the traditional Christmas Season poinsettias it will help. It seems as if I was late last year but there is new news so I am at it again. Let me begin with an update on what has been happening in my world. The time since my war with Brown Recluse Spiders has been my own little experience in learning how to be comfortable with little independence or contact with my community. Once the venal infections were healed and I began to learn to walk all over again I moved to the Christian Brothers Center in Napa for continued physical therapy and health building. The Brothers and their very competent staff were life savers for me. I spent about a year and a half working to finish the healing, reading nearly everything I could get my hands on and doing some writing.

As the time went on I knew that it was time to leave Mont LaSalle to continue the physical therapy elsewhere. The Districts of San Francisco and New Orleans/Santa Fe blended, increasing their territory, schools and Brothers. With that change more Brothers began to come to Napa for health care and other services. They are very fortunate to have such a wonderful place to enter the next phase of their lives. After some complicated discussions with my own superiors I have landed back in the City for what I hope will be my last time and place for the therapy.

Home for me for the next year is a place called AlmaVia. It is in the neighborhood of San Francisco State University on the grounds of St. Thomas More Parish. The "apartments" are very nice and comfortable. While there is a fine staff working here, I require very little of their attention. About the only help I ask for involves putting on VERY tight socks to protect the now fully healing legs. I celebrate Mass each day for the residents and involve myself in normal religious and liturgical work.

The people are nice, the food is excellent and I am closer to my family and friends in the Bay Area. It is my hope to finish the strengthening of my legs by the end of the summer so that I can return to life in a Dominican Community. It seems that the longer I am " on my own" the more I miss community life. The very few experiences in the past year are a few wonderful weddings I have witnessed and the contact with very special friends in the Bay Area and beyond.

Among the things that have engaged me in the past couple of years is the issue of women in ministry. I have had a consistent interest in finding ways in my own ministry to enable women to take their rightful place as Catholic leaders. I suppose that this reflects roots in the first twelve years of my formal education. In addition to a great family as my first learning place, I had the fortune of learning about my faith and virtually everything else from the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael who were my teachers for elementary and high school. They were excellent teachers and role models for one who would go on to spend life in similar service as a Dominican priest.

These are particularly happy times for any of us involved in any way with the Catholic Church. Just over a couple of years or so ago the College of Cardinals elected a Pope who was not a European and the first Jesuit in history. He was not a familiar face around the Vatican and did not come with a hand picked set of in house advisors. Talk about an outsider! In this short time he has changed the face of the papacy and has given a breath of hope to many. He has not done this by turning the Church upside down nor has he made many substantive changes to speak of. But he has simplified, humanized and captured the world with a simple kindness. There are very few persons in doubt that he is God's most recent gift to the Church. What he clearly understands and brings to his office flows from his religious life. He recognizes the value of the principles and needs of ordinary people. He longs for an egalitarian life as a leader who recognizes the ways

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of life that place us on a level playing field. For Francis, his is not a leadership designed to heighten differences among people. Rather, he moves among the people he loves and excludes none of us who are not among the powerful and the mighty in society. He brings the simple life of a religious intellectual called to serve. He has worked among the people, rich and poor alike, as a pastor. There seems to be nothing of "the entitled" in his life and leadership. It seems to me that he is precisely what the Church needs today. When issues are serious he treats them seriously. When the issues are light and not fundamentally significant for salvation, dignity and belief he can lighten up. His humanity is clear and his leadership effective. If I sound excited it is because I am. The Church needs a human face and Pope Francis has invited us to walk with him in finding and presenting such a gift.

Recently I have been exposed to a number of people whose lives are more simple than mine. In most cases they work hard, often in more than one job, and hold their family in a profoundly important position. One couple told me that they saved everything they could for five years so that they could take their children for a two day trip to Disneyland, camping on the beach to save money. I realize that I can live it up at no cost at Disneyland as the guest of a Disney whom I had taught in the past. The world is full of such people and it is to those that Pope Francis has invited us to join him in service.

I wish you all a very happy season with experiences of love, generosity and service for others. Join me in prayer for peace in the Middle East and other places marked by warfare and suffering. Know that I pray for all of you as you live out your own responsibilities to make a difference in society. Work for equality, the dignity of life and for a life of hope and happiness for the many who suffer. Easter reminds us that the truth of the resurrection is accessible to all who ask. Let us be confident in reminding everyone to hear, experience and live in the truth of that promise.

Prayers and Blessings during this season and throughout the this year.

Fr. Patrick LaBelle, O.P.