

A Sermon for the Second Sunday after Easter, April 19, 2026

The Epistle, 1 St. Peter 2:19-25 - The Gospel, St. John 10:11-16

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Eastertide presents a different challenge than Lent. In Lent, we embraced disciplines with a fixed goal. Eastertide invites into the joy and peace of the resurrection, but there is a temptation to abandon the disciplines that cultivated joy and peace during Lent. Eastertide shifts the mood of prayer from penitence and preparation to joy and thanksgiving. But we must maintain our Rule of prayer to cultivate our experience of Easter joy.

We must also understand what Easter joy is and what it is not. It can be mistaken for a subjective emotional experience on one festive day, a kind of resurrection pep rally. The joy of Easter transcends the emotions of any moment. We can have Easter joy even when we don't feel good.

The epistle reveals this truth. St. Peter instructed first century Christians who were suffering unjustly to continue to do what is right. First Peter 2:19 says, "This is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully." In other words, St. Peter did not see a conflict between the suffering of his readers and their Easter joy. For St. Peter, joy could be maintained through temporal experience of grief.

There is a distinction between what the Bible describes as our "inner man" in Christ (Eph. 3:16) and our temporary emotions and desires. Our inner man in Christ is eternal. As 2 Corinthians says, "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). In contrast, our struggles and trials, and the emotions we experience in them, are temporary. They change from season to season and even from day to day.

Spiritual growth is marked by the ability to experience our trials, and the emotions we experience in them, within the context of our true identity and story in Christ. Spiritual growth is highlighted by different questions, such as: How is my faith being strengthened and my motives purified by my current challenges? What am I learning about God and myself? As we mature we become aware of the ways our focus on temporal things tempts us to abandon our faith.

This does not mean that temporary emotions are unimportant or should be ignored. It means that we experience them differently in the context of our resurrection hope. This is revealed in the Psalms. The Psalms express the range of human emotions in various life circumstances. These include: Physical pain, illness, and death; feeling alone and overwhelmed; feeling guilty and pleading for forgiveness and healing. The Psalms invite us to experience these emotions within the context of prayer that trusts God and looks for God's deliverance.

We see this in Job. Job suffers greatly, but it is from Job that we get the great line from our burial liturgy: "I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though this body be destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (19:25-27). Job experiences his temporal suffering within the context of faith and hope. This is the joy of Easter. It is the possession of eternal life and hope, planted in us by the Holy Spirit in baptism, that no temporal thing can take from us.

We lose our experience of Easter joy when we view God mainly as a source of temporal comfort, and then get disappointed when he does not do his job. When we fall into this temptation, we

allow our faith in God to be governed by temporal circumstances. Faith rises or wanes depending on how we feel. This is not the joy of Easter. This is why our trials reveal our faith—or lack thereof. If our faith vanishes whenever we face adversity, what we had was not really faith.

Now, God is a source of temporal comfort. But the main comfort God gives us is, precisely, the ability to understand and experience the unavoidable trials of life in the context of our new story in Christ. This gives our trials meaning, purpose, and a goal. If God is simply a source of temporal relief, like two Advil's taken for bodily aches, we will eventually be led into despair.

There is an unspoken illogicality to the world apart from God. It is trying what is unfixable apart from the cross. The ad promises a cure or the achievement of some goal, but never adds the caveat that these promises are temporary and will be lost to the next illness and ultimately to death. Of course, the ads do say, with a speedy garbled voice and small unreadable print, that what they are offering may cause more serious problems, and comes with various other risks.

It must be clearly stated that there is nothing wrong with temporary pain relief from the perspective of faith. God gives us thousands of temporary graces. In Christ, we experience these graces as sacramental signs of our ultimate healing. For, as Revelation says, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

This is why our healing prayer in the Sacrament of Unction makes sense even if the temporal ailment is not fully cured. For in the resurrection "all thy pain and sickness of body" will indeed be "put the flight" and "the blessing of health" will be restored. That is the ultimate horizon of our prayers.

If we do not understand and experience the temporal in the light of our resurrection hope, we will be stuck chasing temporal reliefs and remedies with no hope for an ultimate and permanent cure. The great anxiety of the world is rooted in the attempt to fix the unfixable, knowing deep down inside that it can't really work. This is why aiming at merely temporal things leads ultimately to despair.

Easter is not a cure for life's challenges. Rather, Easter relocates our trials into the new context of life in Christ. Jesus did not save us from pain and trial. He saved us from meaningless pain and life without hope. Our participation in Gethsemane and Calvary leads us into our participation in Easter. As 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The joy of Easter is to experience everything in the light of this truth. As St. Peter writes in the epistle:

[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Pet. 2:24-25).