

“Christ is risen!”

There was once a holy man who was accustomed to practicing his morning prayers beneath a tree. The roots of the tree stretched down into a nearby river. One morning, as the holy man sat beneath the tree in contemplation, the river began to rise and he noticed a scorpion caught in the roots. The rising river threatened to drown the scorpion so the man reached down to rescue it. But every time he did so, the scorpion struck at him. Still the holy man continued his efforts.

A traveler passing by the scene stopped and commented. “It is a scorpion, it is its nature to strike.”

“But it is my nature to save,” replied the holy man. “Should I change my nature because the scorpion refuses to change his?”

There is a Christian nature, and we are constantly pressured to change our nature by a world that is at odds with it.

What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? Three days ago, on the evening of Good Friday, God sacrificed Himself for our sake. This appeared to be an epic failure. The Lord was dead and buried. The apostles hid in a locked and darkened room, afraid for their lives. Where were the miracles now? For three years the master preached and taught, and shared a glorious vision with us. Did it all really mean nothing? Was it just a naive dream? Had God truly abandoned us?

But now, today, Easter Sunday has dawned and the apparent defeat of Christ on the cross, His sacrifice, has turned into the irreversible victory of the Resurrection. The tomb is empty, the stone is rolled back, and the light of a new creation drives back the darkness of sin and death.

Like the seed that has fallen to the ground and died, only to spring up again with new growth, the sacrificial death of Christ has blossomed into a victory that has remade the world.

It is the nature of Christians to sacrifice ourselves because we are made in the image and likeness of a God who sacrifices. This is true for us as a community and as individuals, apparent failures blossoming into victories, sacrifices that lead to salvation, Good Fridays turning into Easter Sundays.

As we follow Christ, He leads us up the hill of Calvary where we die to ourselves. We sacrifice our own wants and desires, even our dreams, in a painful surrender to God's will – our own Good Fridays.

But through our sacrifice, through our giving up of our wants and desires, we give God room to work in our lives. That work will give rise to newfound wisdom, virtue and happiness, - our own Easter Sundays.

The nature of Christian life is an endless variation on this theme, revealed to us by God through Christ. Good Friday – Easter Sunday; Good Friday – Easter Sunday; Good Friday – Easter Sunday.

When we realize this then we remove some of the doubt and uncertainty in our lives because we know what is coming. If we chase after the glories of Easter, without the sacrifice of the cross, then we have not learned the fundamental lesson of the Gospel.

But when we accept our nature, when we adapt to the rhythm of Christian life, we finally begin to move forward along the road to wisdom, holiness, and a life of fulfillment.

I grew up with a love of fairy tales, as I am sure many of you did. My particular favorites are the ones that involve a young hero, plucked from obscurity and sent on a seemingly impossible quest. But he is helped along the way by guardians and helpers who endow him with magical gifts.

We all know these wonderful stories, we remember them and love them. Why do they stick with us? Fairy tales resonate with us because these stories of good vs evil, humility vs pride, and victory rising from apparent defeat, remind us of timeless truths.

To paraphrase a popular author, all fairy tales are true, some just didn't happen. By that I mean they are not true in their details – magic charms, castles, talking animals and so on, they are true in their meaning.

They are stories of a battle in which good overpowers evil after a long struggle. This is the deep truth of human history and every human life

– the “deep magic” of C.S. Lewis' Narnia books – the truth of Christ, of His cross, and the Resurrection.

The fantastic elements of fairy tales only serve to magnify this basic truth. The heroes of these stories are often the least likely of people, those the world would see as weak and vulnerable. That is why they are so often young boys and girls, not because the stories are meant for children, but because the young are often seen to have the least power.

By contrast the villains are horrible, powerful, and violent, wolves and dragons and evil dark wizards.

The heroes are crushed, and oppressed and imprisoned by the villains, like Christ on the cross, but in the end they achieve freedom and life, like Christ in His Resurrection.

This is our nature, but it is not a nature the world at large understands. We are bombarded daily with a different type of story, in the form of advertising. Advertisers promise power over suffering, not power through suffering. They promise an endless stream of Easters without any Good Fridays.

But today we are reminded, that is not the way things are. That is not the real world. The real world is much more like fairy tales. Perhaps that is why they resonate with us so deeply. In the real world, we are each called to be the hero of our own story. We are called to follow Christ through the cross of self-sacrificing love, to the joy of the Resurrection. And we are called to do so over and over again.

If we change our nature to accept the world presented to us by advertising, we will always be frustrated in this life. We will always be wanting more, more money, more goods, more things, because that's what the world tells us. We will be frustrated because we will be out of touch with the deep truth of human existence.

Because this truth is timeless, it shows up in the most unlikely of places. If there is a modern equivalent of the fairy tale, it may well be the super-hero movies that are so popular these days. The best of them give us heroes that sacrifice themselves. That is the definition of a hero, one who sacrifices himself, or herself, for the sake of others.

In one of the earlier Spider-Man movies, Spider-Man, Peter Parker, is undergoing a crisis of identity. Who he wants to be, is at war with who he is called to be. He wants to be an ordinary young man, working his way through college and spending time with his girlfriend. But he is called to be something else. At one point he even tosses his spider-suit in a trashcan and walks away. But you cannot walk away from who you truly are. Finally it is his aunt who sets him straight. She tells him:

“We need a hero, courageous sacrificing people, setting examples for all of us. Everybody loves a hero, people line up for 'em, cheer for them, scream their names, and years later tell how they stood in the rain for hours just to get a glimpse of the one who told them to HOLD ON a second longer. I believe there is a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble. And finally gets us to die with pride.

Even though sometimes we have to be steady and give up the thing we want most, even our dreams.”

Today we leave Lent behind and embrace the Easter season. How will you spend the next eight weeks? May I suggest that we follow St. Paul's advice and spend it seeking what is above.

Revisit your favorite fairy tales or watch your favorite super-hero movie, and look for those timeless truths that are the foundation of our lives in the real world.

Discover the person God is calling you to be, find yourself the hero of your own story. Be the person who sacrifices their wants, desires, and dreams for the sake of others. Be the one who is steady. Be the hero who lays down their life on Friday, only to pick it up again on Sunday, in a glorious Resurrection.