

St. Paul's Parish, Kent
Easter Day, 8 April 2007
The Reverend Allen LaMontagne, Rector

In the church where I served before coming here, one year we had an Easter Vigil that included an adult Baptism. After the evening service, we gathered in the rectory adjacent to the church for a little reception. At one point during the party I noticed the lights on in the undercroft of the church. With all the excitement of our rarely experienced evening celebration of our Lord's resurrection, the first of the season, I had forgotten that the Alcoholics Anonymous group was having its regularly scheduled Saturday evening AA meeting.

It all goes off simultaneously without a hitch, but it strikes me, the coincidence of these two gatherings. There I am with parishioners, sipping wine and eating hors d'oeuvres, basking in the afterglow of the light of the risen Christ, as just yards away, those attending the AA meeting are also celebrating new life. For them, many friends of mine, parishioners, too, the consumption of alcohol is not part of a pleasurable social experience. It is a way of death. The AA program is life. This night, I'm struck by how it doesn't matter who is at which gathering. What matters is that we respect the dignity of every person, everywhere, and support the efforts of those seeking life, striving to live the new life in Christ, bearing fruit with our lives.

The God of Jesus' resurrection is all over the AA program, and at the heart of it. God is present in the AA meeting, and within the persons gathered there, just as Christ is present with us in this Eucharistic feast, and in the world in so many other wonderful ways.

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous, the meeting being its heart, centers around what are called the Twelve Steps. The first step is: "We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable." **The point is, though some of us are powerless over alcohol, everyone is powerless over death.** God knows this from the beginning and has mercy on us in our weakness. Christ dies for us and is raised again to new life into which we are baptized and resurrected with him. Many recovering alcoholics have looked death in the face. They live into sobriety with deep gratitude for new life given them by their higher power. They are what I call, "Easter people."

Step Two reflects this theology. It says: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." If insanity is hell, sanity equals *life*. Now, AA meetings usually are held in churches downstairs. Upstairs in the sanctuary as well as downstairs in the AA meetings, resurrection takes place. Sanity is being restored. Upstairs or downstairs, there is new life, a radical, Christ-driven departure from the wastelands of over-consumption, consumerism, the idolatry of possessions, the elements of a culture of violence and death.

Out of respect for people of all religions, the A. A. program is not an exclusively Christian organization, but it is very much about resurrection. It is about a profound turnaround, out of death into life, that which the disciples discover incredulously on the first Easter daybreak. *It is this that we need discover and re-discover, time and again, at meetings such as this one, that we are utterly powerless over death, and in realizing this truth, come to believe that a power greater than ourselves restores us to sanity, the reality of life, life now, life everlasting.*

Which brings us to the third step: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*" I don't know to what extent I understand this Easter event, resurrection, but I know I cannot live without it. I know I keep coming back here, like a person in recovery. "Keep coming" is an AA mantra--encouraging words for those who look ahead living entirely in the present. "Keep coming." The meetings are life. Words of encouragement that may as well come from the lips of God, who invites us to gather with praise and thanksgiving as we are brought back in risen life into fellowship with God in heaven and on earth through Christ.

I keep coming because daily I am tempted to think I have power over my life. Often I am tempted to believe that I am all I need, my stuff, rather than trust God from whom all blessings flow. I am tempted to drink from the well of my own accomplishments. I am tempted like Adam and Eve to be a god, rather than, god-like; tempted to forget that without Christ's death and resurrection, I am dead in my sins. I need a meeting such as this, early and often, to remember, "On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread...and after supper he took a cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "drink this, all of you, this is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." I need this over and over and over and over again, God knows, all of us do. I forget, too easily, what God

does for me, and too easily think I am living this thing called life. I'm not; it is Christ in me who lives...

Time doesn't allow us to go through all twelve steps, but **the twelfth is this: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."** One of the strong aspects of the AA program, I believe, is its evangelism. Most people don't know it is there. AA members don't go around judging others, laying guilt trips on people. But if and when you need them, they are there for you; and with grace, simply invite you to a meeting... They will companion with you, join you at a meeting. And they will live out their faith with you, bearing fruit in good works, as an example to one another. *Recovering alcoholics are one type of Easter people.* Alcoholism is one way of learning how we are dying, and how resurrection is the way of salvation and sanity in Christ.

We need to be Easter people, resurrection people. Continuing in the fellowship, in the prayers and breaking of bread, we need carry the Gospel everywhere we go, as St. Francis would say, preach the Good News with our lives everyday, and if necessary, use words. May our message be what was said at the tomb this morning so many years ago, but still fresh in our hearing: "**He is not here; he has been raised.**" Tell yourself, tell your friends, tell everyone, he has been raised--*and you and I with him.*

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!