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The VOX POP... Voice of the People

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Rector's Reflections

The Gift of the Empty Tomb

"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them...the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." St. Luke 24:2-5



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

As we join together in the greatest celebration of the Christian faith this Easter morning, we are reminded that as the faithful women arrived at the tomb they were in a state of holy bewilderment. This gospel narrative from St. Luke offers a unique perspective on the Resurrection, one that begins not with a shout of victory, but with a quiet, puzzling emptiness.

In Luke 24, the women arrive at the tomb carrying spices, expecting to perform the final, sombre duties of burial. Instead, they find the stone rolled away and two figures in dazzling clothes asking a piercing question, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”



As modern Christians, we must realize that this question is not just for the women, it is for us too in the here and now. How often do we look for God in the "graveyards" of our lives? Too often we focus and call to mind our past failures or find ourselves overwhelmed by the hopelessness of our world. Easter reminds us that our God is not a monument to be visited, but a Living Presence who has moved beyond a rolled away stone.

As he continues the resurrection accounts, St. Luke alone gives us the beautiful account of the encounter on the Road to Emmaus. It reminds us that the Risen Christ often walks beside us when we are at our lowest, even when "our eyes are kept from recognizing him." He meets us in the midst of our puzzlement and confusion and explains the Scriptures until our hearts burn within us.

Crucially, the disciples finally recognize Him in the breaking of the bread. This is the heart of our Christian identity and worship. Every time we gather for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we are back in the upper room as well as that room at Emmaus. We are reminded that Christ is made known to us

in the ordinary elements of bread and wine, transformed by His grace and power.

As we focus on being an Easter people beyond this weekend's celebration, we must recognize that this holy day is more than just a historical event. It means that we strive to live with "burning hearts" in what can sometimes be a harsh and cold world. That means that we can see the power of the Resurrection at work whenever we reach out with God's love through our collective ministry. When we offer comfort to the grieving, we are testifying that death does not have the final word. Whenever and however we serve our community, we prove that love is more powerful than indifference. When we forgive one another, we demonstrate that new life is always possible in the Kingdom of God.

The messengers at the tomb told the women, "Remember how he told you." This Easter, I invite you to remember as well. Remember that you are loved with an everlasting love. Remember that there is no darkness so deep that the light and life of Christ cannot pierce it.

May the joy of the Risen Lord fill your homes and your hearts this Eastertide. May you find Him in the breaking of the bread, in the beauty of the liturgy, and in the faces of your neighbours.

In the Peace of the Risen Christ, *Fr. Lance†*

A face from the past to test your guessing skills...



**Sorry Karen,
no one guessed...**



Yet another tiny tot managed to evade our eagle-eyed Ascensioners. This time it was long-time church member Karen Blackmore who beat the odds. Thanks to loving parents Tom and Vicky Moffat who supplied the pictures.

From the Parish Office

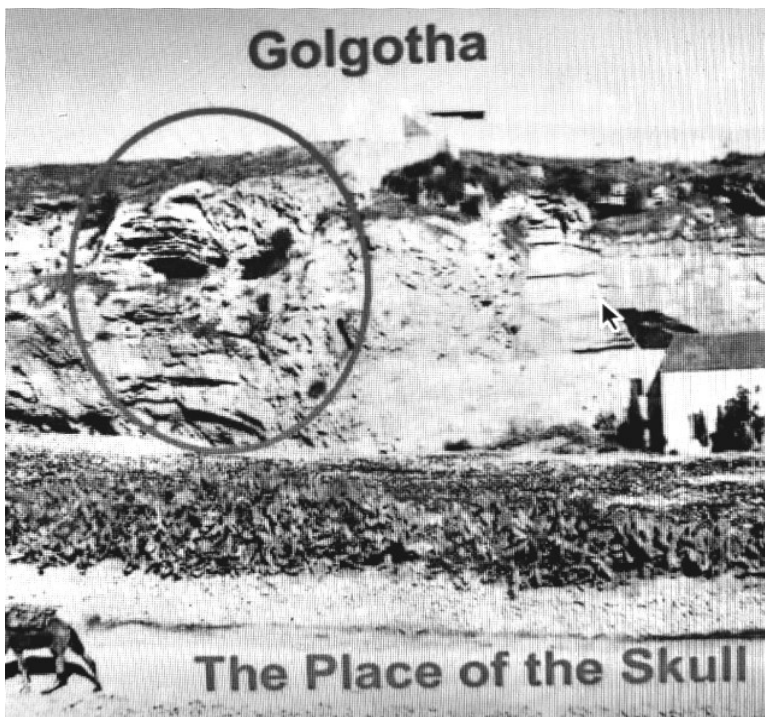
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It's not just a stroll up the Avenue!

I'm sure many of you remember Fred and Judy as they walked proudly up Fifth Avenue blowing allegorical kisses to one another, vocalizing the wonderful music of Irving Berlin and beguiling the romantics amongst us with their unforgettable rendering of "Easter Parade."

Most people of superannuated years have fond memories of this magical moment from the MGM movie. "I'll be all in clover, they sang." And why not, after all, Easter is all about entertaining movies and chocolate eggs and bunny rabbits, and strutting out wearing the latest fashions, isn't it? Well, sorry to break in on your reverie and daydreams, but no, it certainly is not.



Easter, at its beginning, is all about sadness; Easter is about unbearable pain and suffering; Easter is about what is perhaps the greatest and most important event in the history of the Christian religion. In a nutshell, it's about a man dying after having been brutally scourged and nailed to a rough-hewn wooden cross

on a largely abandoned hill known by locals as Golgotha, or "the place of the skull" (pictured).

Just for the sake of the old hymn, the words of which take us back to that time, bear with me and think: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Imagine yourself right up front, watching as the coarse Roman nails are driven into the soft, all too easily, ruptured flesh of those gentle hands and feet and the

groans and stifled scream as the cross is heaved up, shuddering and shaking before being dropped with an awful thud into the waiting hole that keeps it upright for everyone to witness the shame and degradation that the Romans were so adept at portraying. “Gaze on this,” you can almost hear them saying, “and take warning.”

And gaze you do, at that pain-racked face, “adorned” with a cruel band of nature’s thorny spikes that have gouged deep into the forehead and the scalp just above the hairline, releasing rivulets of blood that run across the features and drip down to join that which is seeping from the other hideous wounds onto the stony ground.

“Were you there when the sun refused to shine?” A further verse asks that of you and another goes on to enquire: “Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?” Well, I ask you, can you imagine those moments? Would you have looked on, spell-bound perhaps, or would you have turned away at such wanton barbarity being handed out to someone with whom even the Roman Governor of Judea could find no fault and demonstrably and publicly “washed his hands.” But having written the sign that was affixed to the cross: *Iesvs Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum* (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) he refused to add *Dixit se esse* (He said he was). “What I have written, I have written,” he retorted somewhat testily when asked to modify his words. Was Pilate having deep thoughts of his own?

Think well before you answer my question regarding your supposed actions and thoughts had you been there. I remember a case of murder being reported by a TV news channel not long after I first came to Canada back in the 1970s. Apparently, someone had been shot in a Detroit bar and the police had arrived very quickly on the scene and stopped everyone from leaving.

“Did you see what happened,” the officer in charge had asked of everyone in turn before he allowed them to leave.

Almost everyone questioned responded by saying: “No, I must have been in the washroom.” Apparently, this tiny washroom was not just packed with humanity but was actually capable of squeezing in more than five times its capacity. “People just don’t like to get involved,” said the frustrated policemen.

Well, be that as it may, you cannot turn away from Easter. We are all very much involved. The man giving up his life on that cross was doing it for everyone. As we hear every Sunday, he is the propitiation for our sinful ways and his suffering was very personal to each and every one of us.

The old hymn goes on to mention how its writer often TREMBLES, TREMBLES, TREMBLES, at the thought of what happened on that sad Friday long ago. But it ends with a joyful message about Easter Sunday: “Were you there when he rose up from the dead? Sometimes I feel like shouting, GLORY, GLORY, GLORY, were you there when he rose up from the dead?”

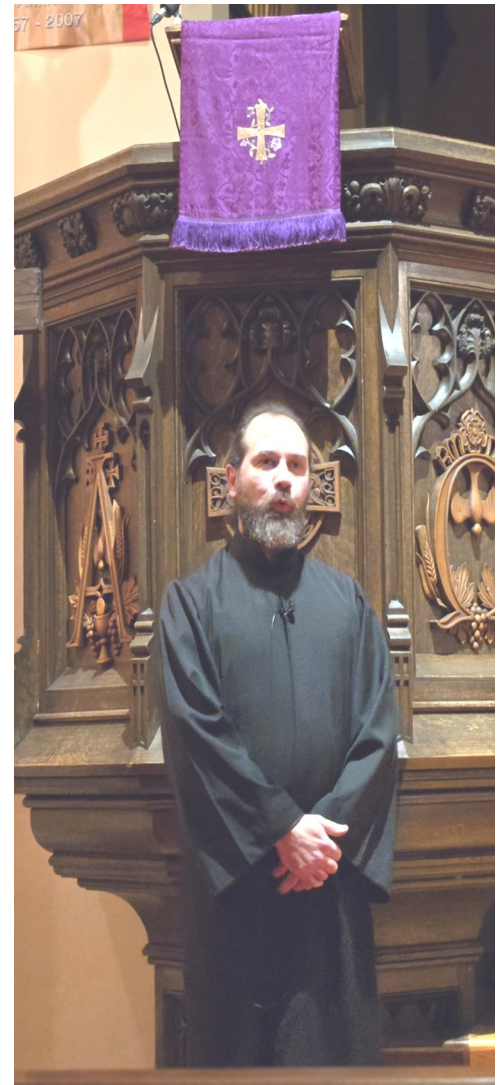
None of us was actually there, of course. It all happened close to two thousand years ago. But the things that occurred during those three days of Easter have lived on and, with our enthusiastic support, will go on living. Undaunted, we Christians continue celebrating that melancholy Friday, when even the Roman centurion was moved to accept that “truly this was the Son of God,” until we arrive at that uplifting and joyful Sunday morning when the stone has been rolled away and the faithful eleven see things that made them proclaim their faith and belief and eventually lay down their lives in support of the advent of a new world order.

So, enjoy those Easter eggs and encourage the little ones in their quests for those left by the Easter bunny. But keep a prayer in your hearts and minds and be thankful for that act of love and caring that gave us all a firm and ever-present shoulder to lean on.

D.H.

Lenten Music and Reflections

During Lent, we welcomed the community into our midst for Lenten Music and Reflections. On February 24th we were introduced to Middle Eastern music and a reflection delivered by Fr. Chadi Kattan, The Pastor of St. Peter's Maronite Church.



Lenten Music and Reflections

On Saturday, March 29th, our Music Director, Steven Hanoosh performed along with guests on guitar, cello and violin.



Souper Bowl XXXI

**A ‘Souperlative Souperbowl’ and a worthy winner!
Eight hopeful contestants matched their culinary skills in an attempt to carve their names on the much-coveted Ascension Souperbowl trophy this year.
But by just a three-vote margin the final count saw the Smith Family entry, “Paula’s Poulet Paradise” carry off the trophy.**



**Thanks
are extended
to all
participating
chefs:**





And to those with the hardest job -Judging!



Pancakes and smiles on a foggy evening

Plenty of Ascensioners braved the adverse weather conditions to help boost church funds on a foggy Shrove Tuesday before the austerity of Lent and six weeks of fasting. Well done and many thanks to everyone who helped make it a success.





Singing is the easy bit.....isn't it?



One day, not too long ago, I had what I thought was a good idea. Why don't I join the choir at Church of the Ascension. Several people had told me that if I could carry at least half a tune, then why not boost the ranks of our blue-clad song-

birds on a Sunday morning and bring a "note" of gladness into my life at the same time?

So, reflecting on the immortal words of Ludvig van Beethoven, who famously claimed that: "music is the mediator between the spirit and the sensual life and should strike fire from the heart of man and bring tears from the eyes of woman," I took the plunge and, captivated by Ludvig's deep thoughts, took the metaphorical bull by the horns and donned the azure robe. All the while hoping that I wouldn't make too many women cry.....

I'd been a choirboy it seemed forever. A lover of classical music, I was, at age eleven, encouraged by a talented lady music teacher to join her school choir and take part in the British Cinema Choral Contest. And what a great time we had, eventually placing third in the all-England finals and performing before two thousand people at the Odeon Leicester Square in London, England, in December 1955.

Decades later after many appearances in amateur dramatics including singing roles in among others, *The Mikado*, *Oklahoma*, *The King and I*, *Little Abner*, *Beauty and the Beast* (as Crazy Old Maurice) *Scrooge* and *The Music Man*, I figured that singing in a choir once again would be like a stroll in the park.

WRONG! WRONG! WRONG! For I had reckoned without taking into account the ravages of Old Father Time's sharp and irresistible scythe which he seems to have swung in my direction with undisguised gleeful alacrity.

For a start, there's the procession to negotiate at the very beginning of the Sunday Service. Seems easy enough when you see the serpentine assembly moving with grace and ease in front of Father Lance, who brings up the rear with his pleasantly stentorian baritone voice that increases everyone's confidence. But as one moves through the different areas of the church the lighting is constantly adjusting its gleam from a helpful brightness to a darkening shadow. As these no-longer young eyes struggle to make out the microscopic hymnbook text, I suddenly realize that the singer in front of me has slowed down and only by a miracle do I avoid a tail-gating disaster.

Moving off again, my aching fingers almost part company with the heavy aforementioned hymnbook and as I jerk forward in a frantic attempt to keep hold of it, I tread on the nether regions of my over-long blue robe and narrowly avoid removing myself from the procession and ending up sharing a pew with someone I'm not even on nodding terms with half-way down the Nave. But that is by no means the end of this "steeplechase." We are fast approaching the Chancel, and a challenging three steps that seem to represent the last three fences from home in England's famous Grand National horserace. Again, I narrowly avoid a calamitous fall as I try to read, sing and negotiate those three stairs. "Made it," I say to myself with my mind triumphing over matter, and I go to take my seat in the choir. But as Yogi Berra famously said: "It ain't over till it's over."

It's at this moment that the gargantuan sleeve of my robe droops like a fisherman's keep-net over the large carved wooden boss at the top of the choir stall and I'm once again jerked to a standstill, dropping the book and desperately trying to wrench myself free

of this insistent encumbrance that could resist the will of a Hercules, ever hoping that no one has noticed.

Now comes the easy bit—the singing while standing still. But that part is soon over and back we go again to the top of the Chancel steps, to give our rendering of the choir anthem, all the time trying not to slip on the highly polished light-oak wooden surface that also contains two hefty steps before I reach the less challenging red carpet. It's at this point that my bookmark decides to prove Isaac Newton's theory as it shuffles off the confines of my binder and flutters away to land at my feet. For a split second I think about bending over to retrieve it from the floor and then suddenly realize that a fellow choir member is right on my tail and if I squat he'll almost certainly go down heavily over the top of me precipitating a catastrophic domino effect worthy of Laurel and Hardy.

Having finished our anthem, we return to the choir and sing another couple of hymns before Communion. This of course necessitates moving out of the choir yet again, kneeling at the altar and nervously trying not to repeat catching my foot in the all-enveloping robe as I rise and retake my seat.

But the “gauntlet” still has some way to run. As the service ends, we move back towards the challenging Chancel steps, singing and again only narrowly avoiding disaster. For the handrail is agonizingly out of reach as, trying to keep a tight grip on the slippery surface of the hymnbook, we move once again from light into semi-darkness to watch the tiny words doing a disappearing act.

Finally we reach the end of the journey. Father Lance is reading the announcements and one of his worthy assistants is sending us off with well-chosen words of encouragement. But now I'm standing behind an enormous pillar that is helping to hold up the roof and can see absolutely nothing of what's going on. Can't go forward and it's too late to retreat as others have closed the line.

Thankfully, I join the rest off the congregation in the church hall for fellowship and refreshment. I hear my wife, Bonnie, chatting with a fellow church member. “He’s enjoying it, I think,” I hear her saying. At which her listener responds: “Hasn’t bitten off more than he can chew, has he?”

D.H



The Ascension Choir is looking for additional members to “Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord”

After Easter, choir practice will move to

Thursday evenings at 7:30pm.

For more information:

Speak with our Director of Music,

Steven Hanoosh or call the church office

Truly, a man for all seasons.....

Among the many great assets that we all enjoy at Church of the Ascension is the warm, affectionate approach of our much-loved Rector, Father Lance, (*pictured below*) He's always there to quietly offer comfort and sympathy to the aggrieved; boost our enthusiasm for church events; lead the appreciation for our many volunteers and exude joy whilst joining in with our celebrations when all is going well. He's truly a "man for all seasons."

But, sometimes with a twinkle in his eye or a smiling, sympathetic turn of the head towards a cowering smartphone owner who failed to render silence to his or her machine, his other self appears and he becomes the much-gifted orator whose greatest love is speaking to his flock from the Chancel steps and meandering down amongst us to deliver his words of wisdom and encouragement on Sunday mornings.

So, when you see Father Lance mounting the creaky five steps to begin his sermon from the dizzy heights of the reverential and ornate pulpit, you know that something of great magnitude is about to be stridently delivered, something that requires our undivided attention.

So it was a few short weeks ago on Transfiguration Sunday. On a day that coincided with the annual Vestry Meeting, where dry and usually somewhat tedious facts and figures are given the Father Lance treatment and transformed into excitement-inducing expressions to arouse our anticipation, he decided to pre-empt the meeting and make sure that the entire congregation was made privy to some heart-warming good news.



High above us, from the pulpit, he checked the fidelity of the microphone with a flick of his finger that sent a thunderous boom echoing around the church and, certain of the loan of everyone's ears, he launched into his sermon, choosing as his subject: Numbers.

No, not the Book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Old Testament. The numbers that Father Lance wanted to share with us were peculiar to our Church of the Ascension. And after some mention of numbers as they appear in so many verses and chapters of the Bible, he warmed progressively to his subject and, like a magician producing a rabbit from a hat, revealed, with a smile that matched the sunny morning, more and more positive numbers that had helped make 2025 a year to celebrate.

Happy he was to place on record the good news that our church is 'moving in the right direction.' "We are finally emerging from the ravages of the pandemic," he announced with contagious delight.

Stressing that its malicious effects are still being felt in every church community, he went on to say: "I truly believe that we have begun to turn the page in moving past some of the consequences suffered as a result of the shut down. "When you look at our attendance statistics for most services for instance, even though we're not quite back to pre-pandemic numbers on a weekly basis, we are getting closer. Our Sunday and weekly average attendance was up again this year over 2024, and of particular note, our Christmas attendance slightly exceeded our pre-pandemic 2019 Christmas numbers."

Yes, it was all about numbers. And Father Lance, was only just getting started. "On the stewardship front," he continued, "once again there is positive news. On what I think is a first in my 30 years of ministry, our charitable envelope contributions exceeded what we had budgeted. This amounted to an increase of

giving by over \$20,000 over the prior year. This is a notable achievement.”

He went on to make it clear that certain expenses had also risen but “a win is a win,” he maintained, like a hockey coach congratulating and inspiring his team: “NUMBERS MATTER.”

Clearly emotionally moved, our spiritual guide continued: “I don’t need to share with you that we have been blessed with many new faces in our midst recently, and for that we can be truly thankful.”



At the end of the Vestry Meeting, before which we all shared a most-welcome repast of chili or soup provided by those same volunteers that Father Lance had earlier thanked, Father Don Hull (*pictured left*) put everything we all felt into some well chosen and sage words in thanking Father Lance for all the blessings he brings to Church of the Ascension.

For myself, and I’m sure I speak (or write) for everyone when I say that I pray that these good works will go on for many, many more years

D.H.