

Dear Friends,

Happy Easter!

Hopefully you will hear that greeting for many days after Easter Sunday. It's by design. Easter is a season, it's not one day. And while Lent is 40 days; Easter is 50 days. Easter is longer. We spend more time celebrating than repenting. While it feels a little odd to say that this year, with quarantine and stay-at-home, it is what we are called to do and who we are called to be. We are an Easter people and we can still be an Easter people in quarantine, at our homes, on Zoom and Google Hangouts, via FaceTime and phone calls, in the midst of crisis and confusion.

In my homily at the Easter Vigil I spoke about the importance of imagination. This is not to encourage living in a fantasy world, or pretending that the present reality is something that it isn't. No, in fact, it is an invitation to participate and co-create, to labor alongside God. When we can imagine possibilities and new life, we open ourselves to changes, and then strive for them. As we heard in the Gospel from the Easter Vigil, "And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them." (Mt 28:9)

There is an important message for us as a parish in that Gospel verse. It speaks to the gritty reality of our journey as Christians. As we imagine and as we strive, the risen Christ meets us in the middle of the journey, in the midst of the work. Jesus finds us, before we've finished the work, before the problems are resolved; there, in the middle, in the unresolved tensions that are part of all our lives. We are surprised and greeted with love, grace, and possibility that was beyond even our original imagining.

I had imagined many great things were possible at Bellarmine, but I did not imagine I would spend my first Easter Vigil as pastor in what seemed to be an empty chapel. Yet, as the vigil continued, by God's grace, and with a little help from photos taped to the pews, I realized the chapel was even more full than the fire marshal would have ever allowed.

I did not imagine I would have an inbox overflowing with messages of hope and joy, thanks and gratitude. I did not imagine my phone would be filled with photos and videos of families celebrating Mass together with us at home. I did not imagine that the parish

staff would retool our ministries, with a zeal and fervor that left me breathless. I did not imagine that Bellarmine would start an emergency community assistance fund that would help us increase our outreach to our neighbors who have lost jobs and healthcare, as a result of the economic crisis. I did not imagine dozens of volunteers heroically stepping up to help through St. Vincent de Paul and our other outreach ministries. I did not imagine that a campus without students would strengthen Bellarmine's collaboration with XU, build new bonds with the Center for Faith and Justice and ignite exciting new projects with Xavier's Institute for Spirituality and Social Justice.

Christ has found Bellarmine parish, along the way, in the midst of a difficult journey through this pandemic. Christ has greeted us with love, grace, and possibility that was certainly beyond my own, and I'd venture to guess, all of our original imaginings.

I will not pretend to know exactly where this will take us all as a parish. Yet, I know that we will be changed. I know that Christ will greet us along the way and invite us to imagine again, something new, something wonderful, and something beautiful. We are an Easter people and we are learning new ways to celebrate and to express who we are this season.

In gratitude, wonder and awe,

Fr. Eric