



# Arise

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*A reflection/letter to foster on pastoral and spiritual growth*

*By Bob Traupman/ contemplative writer*

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## *The Victory of Our God*

### *Twenty-fifth Anniversary Year*

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Editor's Note: This is the eighth of the series of the "The Best of *Arise* as we come near the end of our Twenty-fifth Anniversary Year. This particular issue is from Easter 2003 and the war I'm referring to is, of course, that of Iraq. Perhaps you'll resonate with my dilemma at the time . . .

**In early April**, I had been trying to write a piece for my other reflection/letter **For Priests Only**, to celebrate Easter against the background the War [in Iraq]. But I had a case of writer's block big time. It slammed me into a state of depression. [My bipolar disorder was still bothering me those days.] I was disappointed and worried because I couldn't muster much joy to lead the folks in a decent Easter Eucharist. I mused, "Good Friday will be my focus this year; resurrection will take a while.

As it turned out, I couldn't write that issue. The bombardment of images from the war brought me a jumble of thoughts and confused emotions.

I talked to one of my editors about my plight and he reminded me "**Easter**

**celebrates Christ's victory over every evil and over every death. Within every Easter celebration, every observance of the Paschal Mystery, is the celebration of Christ's final victory, final triumph in the final battle between good and evil."**

So I was called to muster my faith. And I was reminded that **Easter is the feast of faith**. In it, we renew our baptismal promises, we renew our commitment to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



But I couldn't see victory in Iraq with so much death and destruction and suffering. I was also reminded of Pope John Paul's statement: **"War is always a defeat for humanity."** I needed to be in heavy prayer to sort out my thoughts and feelings. Holy Week provided the time to do that. And I took the pressure off myself and chose to reprint a past issue, rather than to write a new one for the April issue of **For Priests Only**. Thus, I could deal with all this privately rather than trying to write in the midst of my confusion and bewilderment. What I realized was that I was ill spiritually. This war had taken its toll on me. Though we are not encouraged to talk about it, I suspect that it has taken its toll on a great many of us.

"War is always a defeat for humanity." If that is the case, where is the victory?

I was able to prepare myself to help those in my congregation have a good, and maybe even joyful experience of Easter by bracketing the war—putting it on the back burner. And I actually found the joy of Easter elsewhere.

On Tuesday of Holy Week a priest friend of mine sent me an email to tell me he had just made a wonderful retreat. He said he had renewed and deepened his relationship with Christ and was elated; I could tell he was quite excited about it; I was really happy for him.

That email brought me the Easter joy I was seeking. I felt that I could now honestly celebrate Easter morning Eucharist.

Easter is fifty days long with seven Sundays of Easter and then Pentecost—ten days longer than Lent. I've found that it's hard to keep the celebration going for that length of time. But it is well worth the effort.

**Here's what I suggest to extend your Easter joy throughout the Easter season:**

Every night take about three minutes to look back over your day. Take note of any events, even or especially little ones that brought you a bit of joy or a spiritual uplift during the day.

I think the little moments are the best. After awhile, you will learn to create some of these moments as I did today by calling a friend.



**Easter can come in small sizes, like Easter eggs and butterflies.** These are little things but they do bring Easter joy. Easter eggs remind us of new life. Butterflies remind us of the mystery and miracle of transformation.

Who would think that a nasty little caterpillar that plods along from plant to plant chomping on leaves could be transformed into a thing of beauty—a butterfly

that dances in the air as it goes about its mission of pollination—seemingly an entirely new creature but still having the same core of life as the caterpillar.

Resurrection is such wondrous transformation. Transformation from the limitations of existence to the freedom of life in the spirit. Surely this is a tremendous victory for caterpillar-types! So look for the "Easter eggs" and the "butterflies" in the midst of your day.

**Now I would like to offer** an imaginative meditation on my favorite resurrection story. I will reflect on the story, the fruit of my own imagination; but you need to engage your own. I recommend first reading the Scripture itself (**Luke 24:13-35**). The reading of the actual words of Scripture is a powerful source of grace.

(Please note: When I use the actual words from Scripture, **they appear in bold type**; the narrative appears in regular type and when I offer comments about the story, *these appear in italics*.)

**"That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples, one by the name of Cleopas, were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus."** They were sad and **downcast**, as they were discussing the events in Jerusalem over the previous three days.

*Think about how all of Jesus' disciples must have felt during the interim between Good Friday afternoon and whenever they were able to fully grasp that Jesus had risen. Think of a time when you felt distraught and discouraged.)*

Then Jesus invited himself along and they began to converse with him as they walked. *Note that they were walking side by side, so they were not looking at him directly. They do not recognize him, and began telling Jesus about Jesus*

**". . . a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him."**

*(Why do they not recognize him? Are they just ruminating over depressing events?)*

**They told him, "We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel."**

*(Feel the depth of their disappointment and anguish -- and fear; they must have been heartsick; the brother whom they loved had died. What kept them from a sense of hope?)*

They knew that women in their company had gone to the tomb early that morning and found the tomb empty, but had seen a **"vision of angels who announced that he was alive."**

Then Jesus interjected, **"'Oh how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!' Then beginning with Moses and**

**all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures."**

*(What did he tell them that enabled them to see and act differently? What change was taking place in them?)*

When they reached their village, they pressed him, **"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over."**

*(How do you think the disciples were feeling at this point? Had a change or transformation occurred in them?)*

**"So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was at table"**

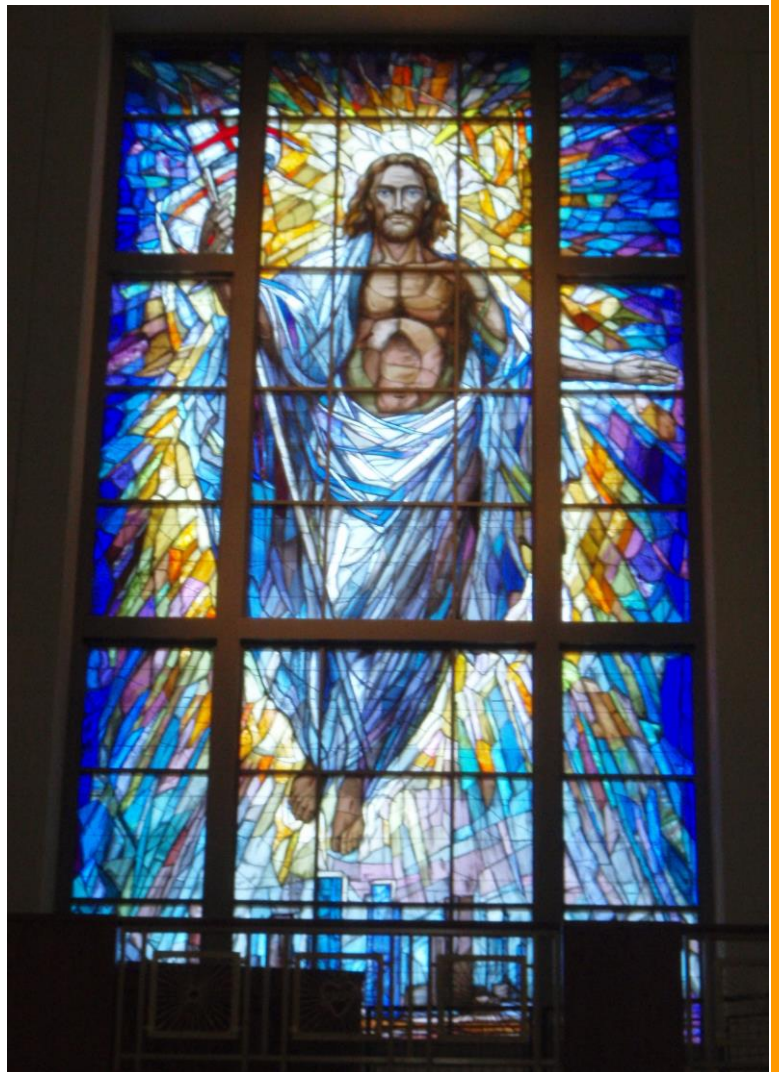
*Now they could see him directly, not along side of them, but across from them. –*

**"He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and THEY RECOGNIZED HIM, but he vanished from their sight.**

A veil had covered their eyes, but now their eyes were opened and they recognized him—in the **breaking of bread."**

And then they returned to the Eleven in the Upper Room and **"recounted** what had taken place along the way and how [Jesus] was made known to them in the breaking of bread." **There was victory in their hearts!**

Now for a couple of



concluding observations:

Love of the holy Eucharist: Down through the centuries the church has recognized the Lord—has recognized itself—in the breaking of bread. This prompts a deep and abiding love for participating in the holy Eucharist.

*(What kinds of varied feelings do you have when you celebrate the Eucharist? What could deepen your love of the gathering, listening, sharing, singing that is the holy Eucharist?)*

(Eucharist is a verb and a noun!)



And then this: **The disciples realized "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"**

Cleopas and his friend came very, very close to Jesus in their conversation on the way. It was an intimate moment they would always remember.

I can remember a good number of holy (that is, open and honest) conversations that changed my life and have given me the nourishment to grow and move on.

*(Who are the people in your life who nourish and encourage you in conversation; whom do you so nourish?)*

So where is the victory for you this day?

My victory today: (1) anointing a dear lady who gazed at me with wide blue eyes, (2) a wonderful phone conversation with my buddy Gordon whom I only talk with about once a year, and (3) getting over my writer's block.

+ And victory in Iraq? Certainly not a spiritual one. Well, we know how *that* turned out.

++ **And where is the victory for you this day?** (Be sure to look for little things, like Easter eggs and butterflies.)

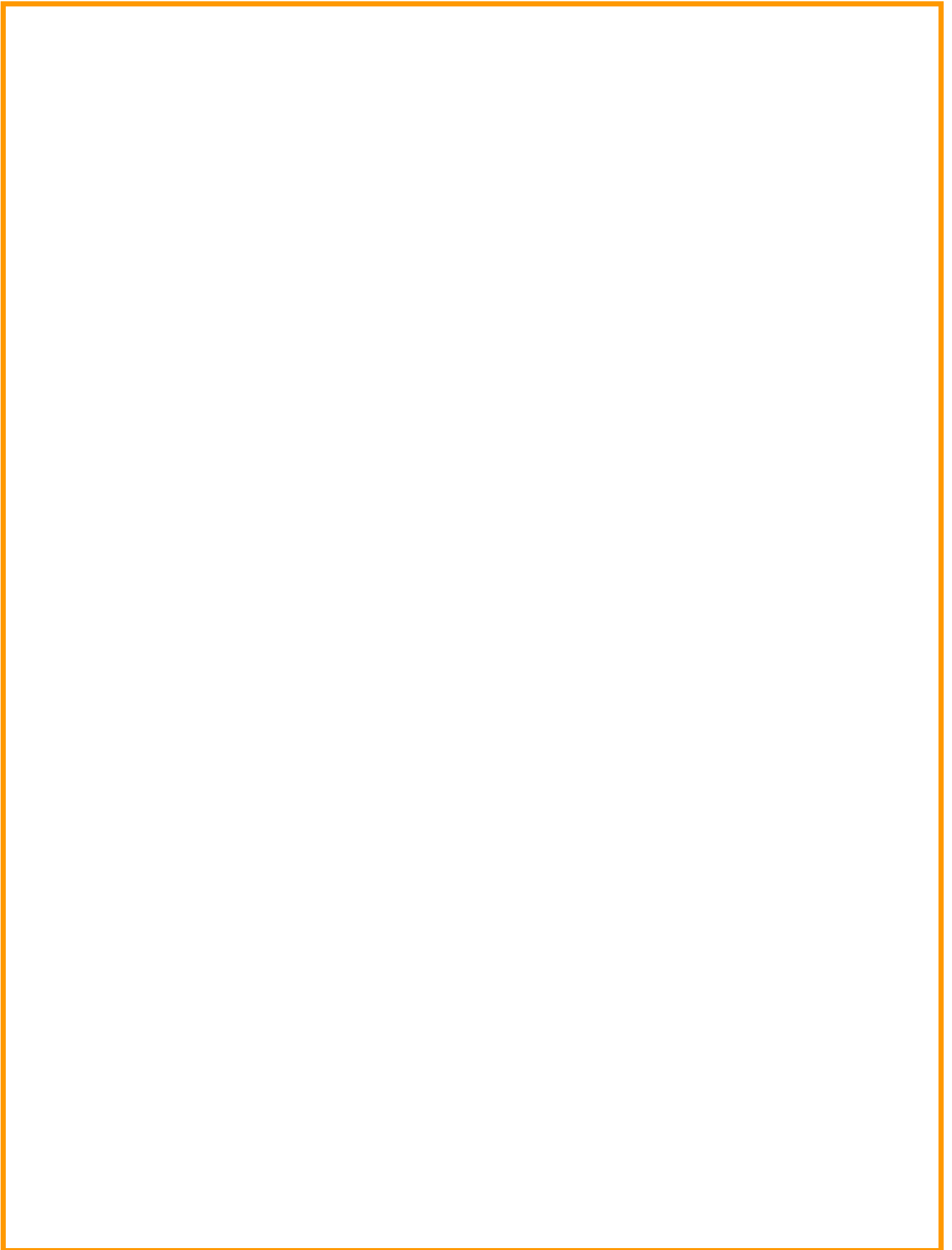
+++ And I suggest reading **Luke 24:13-35** one or two more times. Put yourself in the story.

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Bob Traupman 2014  
2999 NW 48th Avenue, Apt. 251  
Lauderdale Lakes, FL 33313  
904-315-5268 / email: [arise7@me.com](mailto:arise7@me.com)  
web site: [www.spirit7.com](http://www.spirit7.com)  
**Check out my blog at: [www.bobtraupman.com](http://www.bobtraupman.com)**













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2014 Bob Traupman  
2999 NW 48th Avenue, Apt. 251  
904-315-5268 / [arise7@me.com](mailto:arise7@me.com)  
web site: [www.spirit7.com](http://www.spirit7.com)

**Check out my blog at: <http://bobtraupman.com>**