

Easter Morning 2026

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St. Chrysostom's Episcopal Church | Chicago, IL

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Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Welcome, and Happy Easter.

Some of you will know and many of you won't that we host a small, simple Holy Communion service on Wednesday evenings, 6pm in the little chapel right next to me. It's quiet, spare, and spoken. The faithful come to worship in an unadorned manner, and I find that I enjoy the peace and the quiet of that tiny little Mass.

In the season of Lent—those 40 days of fasting and preparation that we just completed—that service is even more stark than usual. No flowers. Dark purple cloth. Veiled crosses. No blessings and a bit of extra emphasis on sin, death, and the devil. I know I'm really selling it, but you'll just have to believe me that it's a meaningful time to come and to pray.

Several weeks ago at that midweek Mass, even though we were right in the throes of Lent, I thought I was losing my mind a bit. I had given a short sermon, like usual. And I had asked God to bless the wine and the bread, like usual. But when I was distributing the wafers, I swear I could smell flowers, specifically lilies. And I

knew this was impossible. We don't dress the church in flowers in Lent. And we certainly don't use lilies, which are often a symbol of Easter resurrection. And so, I found myself worrying that I was having a mild stroke or some possibly more exotic medical issue. But I kept smelling lilies.

When the service concluded, I finally turned around and, mercifully for my mental health, there in the corner was a small bouquet of lilies. I asked the flower guild what that was all about, and they said that someone had put in a request that flowers be put in the altar in memory of someone who had died, and they thought that, even though it was Lent, they might place them discretely in the side chapel as an act of kindness. What a lovely gesture. I thought it was sensitive and pastoral and sweet.

In that moment, I remember thinking: this is the soul and center of the Christian life. Lent is the time of danger and darkness in our church year. We read stories of the devil and evildoers and harsh lessons from the mouth of Jesus. We fast from beauty and rich foods and alcohol and even our favorite word, Alleluia.

And yet, there I was, even as I was a priest leading the people in the stark rites of Lent, and all I could do is smell the lilies. In the middle of the harsher parts of life, Easter had a way of breaking in.

Last week, Palm Sunday, we heard a story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, in solidarity with the peasantry and in opposition to the Roman state. And there was a little detail in that reading that I certainly never learned in Sunday School. In that reading from Matthew, it says that at the moment Jesus died, the tombs in Jerusalem were broken open and the dead walked through the town. There was something in the very person of Jesus on that cross that made life absolutely unstoppable. The Easter glory that lives in the Son of God cannot be contained by state, by cross, by cowardice, nor by death. God's Easter majesty cannot be restrained by any power or earth. Or, put in more humble terms, a Christian can always smell the lilies.

What we celebrate this morning is no less than the breaking of the tombs, the emptying of hell, the ruination of evil, and the impotence of death to have the last word in any venue in which Christians gather. There is a reason that we begin every funeral service with the words Alleluia. They are an echo of what happens this morning on Easter, which is itself an echo of the power of Jesus' empty tomb.

Because of what happened at Easter, all the powers and principalities of the world are on notice that Christians are unimpressed. Christians do not bow to the idols of the world, and Christians absolutely believe the impossible. We believe that cruelty will not have the last word, and we believe that death is temporary. Resurrection people build our castles in heaven, and we have very little time for the nonsense of

kings and emperors who think they are gods. We know what divinity looks like, and it looks like a peasant teacher who said “love one another.” Who said “eat bread and wine when you are together.” Who said, “baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” We know that God looks like a holy man who the powers-that-be decided was worth nothing and then who turned the entire world on its head by being raised from the dead.

And if these last few paragraphs have seemed a bit high-minded or even metaphysical, they probably were. But if your priest can’t do that at Easter, when can he? Even though this is the morning to break out the Alleluias and the great hymns of the church, we can remember the simple things too. We can remember the smell of the lilies when we least expected them. We can remember that, just as our God tears Temple curtains and breaks open the tombs in all of Jerusalem, it is the same God who sends us a sweet scent on Easter morning to bolster our faith. Nothing is too big or too small for our God to accomplish. Happy Easter. Alleluia, Christ is Risen. Amen.