

To all of our children & their loved ones: **Charlie & Kathy** Easter, 1992

With ^{this} letter I inaugurate a new annual custom. You may call it the first epistle according to Big Daddy, because I propose to preach. Normally, in my letters I avoid "I". (You hadn't noticed?) So, now I shall use it willfully & knowingly, precisely because this letter shall be strictly used I think. It will be an extension of my philosophical opinions. Naturally, you are free to disagree. And I don't purport to be right even most of the time, let alone infallible. But, other times, in speech & writing, one tends to conceal their real thought. One avoids disputes, scenes, & doesn't wish to be or appear pushy or categorical. One knows how unwelcome advice is, especially gratuitous advice, & one tends to defer to the feelings of others. This is generally wise, I suppose, or pretty soon no one would be speaking to anyone else. So - therefore be warned - this will be an annual exception when I, as a parent, will opt to express opinions born of varying experience & much thought - & without apology.

Whence came the idea? While meditating in church on Good Friday, I recalled how, as at Christmas, Easter was a day when we all went to the same mass as a family. Certainly this ranks among one of our grandest traditions, as far as I'm concerned. But look at the situation this Easter: Charles & Kathy in Calif; Gary (sorry women libers - I shall list the man in the duo first!) in Texas & Martha enroute in Tenn; John probably Dairhovens bound; & Monica in Madrid! Obviously, getting together would pose some problems, which (I expect) will increase as the years evolve. But, this letter is one way we can still get together each Easter.

And why Easter? Well, that's what it's all about - isn't it? [I still recall when I was in the 6th grade our miss had us each write a paper on which we thought was the greatest day - Christmas or Easter - & why. Well, I chose Christmas. I flunked, because it is, of course Easter. After all, our faith is based on the fact of the resurrection. But I still argued with the teacher (& ended up being passed conditionally, & having to go to summer school the only time in my life) - I said - "I recognize that from our view & that of the church that Easter, marking the resurrection, is the supreme feast;

②] but 'in itself' Christmas has to be the bigger event. After all, if Christ was God, raising Himself from the dead was no big deal, but, by the same token, if Christ was God, the fact of God deigning to become man (would you deign to become a rock?) has to be the most tremendous act of love - for us by Him - imaginable!] Well, as I say, I flunked. But it does prove, I think, & however vulnerable my logic or theology, that I was even then a would-be philosopher. After all, who ever starts a defense by opening "in itself" ???

So - Easter is the great day for the faith. And, of course, I feel the faith is the greatest gift we share. And, never forget, it is a gift! It is vulnerable, & can be easily lost or taken away. Now, I happen to think an untested faith is particularly insecure - almost to the point of such faith (i.e. - an untested one) not really being an act of faith "in itself". To know something doesn't involve or demand faith, on the one extreme. To be indifferent or apathetic likewise entails no faith, on the other extreme. Meaningful faith means you don't know, ^{but} you do care & are concerned, & you have doubts - even serious ones - BUT, you persevere! So that's what I mean when I say that the only real faith is faith under test under strain. And God knows the world presents enough tests & strains these days. So - my secret word for this Easter is - "PERSEVERE", i.e. - keep the faith! When things are confused - dull - boring - or what-hoc-ym - stick to the sacraments! Rather, & more precisely - stick to "The Sacrament" - at least weekly Holy Communion.

The Eucharist, next to the faith, has to be the biggest & best deal God ever blessed us with. And He gives the spirit - & all of us have or will have our ups & downs - the more important we stick with it. All of us have enjoyed so much good fortune - e.g. - our health, reasonable affluence, our spouses, our children, our FAITH, etc, that we often don't even stop to realize how blessed we've been. The Diana Barrymore - we've perhaps had "Too Much! Too Soon!" But

③] there come times when you realize that Christ (His Church!) is the only answer to - "But to whom shall we go, Lord?" In example, when both Mom + Charlie's lives were in question at his birth, there was only one place I could go - to the Chapel! When we got the news of George's high speed intimacy with the earth, there was only one place to go - to church. It's when directly confronting new life & near death that we most naturally sense our own utter frailty, & the limitations of all of modern science. [Incidentally, reference to George recalls another of our traditions of which I'm proud - our attempt (not wholly successful) to focus attention on our personal "Saint's Days". I vividly recall that 3 Oct when I addressed all my prayers via St George & St Martin - & St Teresa, whose feast is 3 Oct - & I don't think it hurt a bit, & I must say this is to be desired as to having to resort, say, to St "Lance" or St "Fawn" - granting they're sharp sounding names. In short - I commend good Christian names, you'll never know when you may need all the help you can get.] But, in any case, I guess my point here is that penicillin will never rightfully or totally replace prayer! And speaking of "points", I guess it's clearly now that I have no overall one - I'm just rambling, & it's so nice not to be interrupted [to! I can't spell, or write legibly!] But, why shouldn't a parent be able to just think out loud to his kids now & then. Why must every kid in his turn make all the same mistakes. I'm trying to free you to be real innovators when it comes to making mistakes. And, I guess, I think the biggest mistake would be to accept a temptation against the faith as a loss of faith. Even the saints had dark nites of the soul. (Remember the secret word - PERS'EO & RE!) Stay with The Sacrament. In the latter regard (i.e. - should one be tempted to forgo regularly at communion, I recognize a maturing sense of temperance (I hope!) in myself. E.g. I wouldn't today be moved to explode - "Damn it! Go to church!" (I don't think resort to authority is the proper response to a form

④ ^{temptation against authority.} Neither would I be inclined to ~~plead~~ -
If you love or respect me, just do it for me. (I think an
appeal for faith in me would be exceptionally inappropriate & presumptuous
where the issue is an incipient loss of faith in God) And besides,
it wouldn't do any good to do it for me. You don't (or shouldn't) do such
things for me. You go to church only indirectly even for yourself. You
go to church for God! In love of God! To give glory to God! To
give thanks to God! To express sorrow to God! And, only
lastly, to petition God. But in all events, the central focus is God!
(I first of all thank Him for my faith, my wife, my children, & my
health. I then apologize for my sins. I then ask His help to do
whatever it is He expects of me - & for all of you, I pray that He
will confirm your faith, sustain your hope, & overwhelm you with His
mercy - to me this is what it's all about. And before one preys
such a philosophy one should first evolve a viable alternative.)
And certainly one should never confuse means with ends, accidental
with substance, instruments of the church with the church. No one
knows better than I how spiritually bankrupt are the meagre words
that so feebly flow from our altars today (but we do go to give
glory more than to listen) And many of our priests are less than
inspiring even as men, let alone as priests. And the hierarchy itself
sometimes seems overly oriented to business-administration, ^{rather} than to
administration of the sacraments. And whether my opinions are justified
or even right - **THEY ARE TOTALLY IRRELEVANT TO THE CENTRAL
FACTS OF THE FAITH.** After all, some Pope's even entertained
mistresses in the Vatican. The church prevailed - as it should - &
as Christ promised it would. And don't forget, re priests, that even
Christ Himself was surrounded by a doubter, a denier, & a traitor.
Three out of twelve of His own chosen few blew it! That's 25%
to his instruments are incidental, no matter how culpably prescumbly.
And we're all vessels of clay. (I ain't throwing the first stone.) And
meanwhile I shall replace as much glass in my temple as possible.

⑤] Well, I guess I've rambled enough for this first time. And I promise not to inflict my thoughts on you til next Easter, God willing. I'd just add one thought, mindful that four of you are now married. In retrospect I feel like a good catholic marriage is like a license to cheat in the game of salvation. I say this in the context of my over-riding conviction about the basic purpose of a good catholic marriage, to wit: "an alliance wherein 2 individuals, with God's help, dedicate themselves to each helping the other get to heaven!" If each of you, now a partner to a couple, helps the other to do that - well, that's it! Think about it! Apply it practically. Ours decisions & conduct according to that principle - & all shall be well, eventually - eternally. And, it has a delightful, gratuitous, by-product, short term benefit - you enjoy a good deal of temporal happiness. I said it true - you have discovered you are happiest when you have done something for someone you love, with no thought of recompense, but because you love them & want to make them happy. Happiness is a boomerang. (I wish I'd said that!), i.e. - you only get it when you throw it away - by doing for others, as a spouse, & children, especially predispose you to divorce my analogy to cheating! Marriage forces you to put yourself last - or - it doesn't work. Well - please don't number me among the prophets of doom or gloom, or finger pointers or wavers with alarm. I'm reasonably happy this Easter, & sincerely wish you all a happy, healthy, & holy new year - til next Easter. You all can help. Pray. Work at your faith. Love one another. Spread good cheer. Express thanks. Try ~~to~~ criticism & complaining. Stay with "the" sacrament. Keep the faith! Love & God Bless!

Til next Easter ~ Dad