

RITES OF PASSAGE

The cycles of nature affect all of us. There are daily, monthly, and yearly cycles. Calendars are a chronological ordering of these cycles, and the beginning of a new cycle brings vitality, new life, and a certain freshness. The old cycle is laid to rest, so we use the expression “put it behind you.” But the old cycle is not completely forgotten. The new cycle begins and usually there is a remembrance of the event that occasioned or brought about the new cycle. This especially is true concerning religious observances. There is a solemn remembrance of the past, and there is celebration for the present and the future. For example, the Jewish Passover remembers ancient Israel’s exodus from bondage in Egypt and celebrates that deliverance with hope for freedom for all peoples. The Christian focus during Easter remembers the work of Jesus of Nazareth in dying and rising and thereby celebrates new life and the hope of resurrection for all humanity. Other religions also remember the seasonal renewal of nature at springtime, and they celebrate this annual occurrence with rites about the giving of life or birth, fertility, and the ongoing productivity of nature. Thus, the preponderance of eggs, bunny rabbits, and lilies and tulips at this time of year.

To focus on these occurrences in a concrete way, we conduct rites. A rite may be defined as a formal act designed to observe or celebrate these important cycles of life. We conduct religious rites during Easter and Passover, and we also conduct rites for anniversaries, for birthdays, for memorials, for dedications of significant places, and for important civil and national events. Rites express symbolism. They point to realities greater than the rite itself. They usually are repetitive, corresponding to the various cycles of nature. Rites also bring to our remembrance the shared experience of the community and become a means of continuing and

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renewing the community. Such acts focus on transitions and could be called rites of passage.

They focus on the one variable common to all human experience—the variable of growth and change. So when you eat that chocolate egg or when you smell the beautiful lily or when you

cuddle that soft, furry rabbit during this Easter season, just remember that time marches on.

Marvelously, our God continues to renew his creation, and by doing so he brings to each one of us new life with a new purpose and meaning for life.