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# Obama Hosts Easter Prayer Breakfast

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 19, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

President Obama held his second Easter Prayer Breakfast this morning at the White House. Of course, we have not even gotten to Good Friday yet, but the timing of the breakfast was apparently unavoidable. Yesterday, a senior White House official told NCR that the breakfast was held on the Tuesday of Holy Week at the request of ministers who were otherwise engaged on Easter. For clergy, of course, Holy Week is a hellishly busy week! Still, it is good to remember that setting the date of Easter was cause for great controversy in the early Christian church as some followed the Roman practice of celebrating Easter on Sunday while other Eastern churches followed the Hebrew calendar and celebrated it on the 14th of Nisan, no matter what day of the week it fell on. So there is at least an Eastern precedent for celebrating Easter today.

The Easter Prayer Breakfast was started last year by President Obama. The President also has hosted a Passover seder at the White House and marked other religious holidays with similar events. Here, however, the President gives testimony to his own faith. That will not keep some of the crazies from suggesting he is not really a Christian, but crazies will be crazies. Here is the text of the President?s remarks:

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you. Please, please have a seat.

Well, it is absolutely wonderful to be here with all of you today. I see so many good friends all around the room. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge one particular member of my administration who I?m extraordinarily proud of and does not get much credit, and that is USAID Administrator, Dr. Raj Shah, who is doing great work with faith leaders. (Applause.) Where?s Raj? Where is he? There he is right there. Raj is doing great work with faith leaders on our Feed the Future global hunger program, as well as on a host of other issues. We could not be prouder of the work that he?s doing. I also want to acknowledge Congressman Mike McIntyre and his wife, Dee. (Applause.) Mike -- as some of you know, obviously, North Carolina was ravaged by storms this past weekend, and our thoughts and prayers are with all the families who have been affected down there. I know that Mike will be helping those communities rebuild after the devastation.

To all the faith leaders and the distinguished guests that are here today, welcome to our second annual -- I?m going to make it annual, why not? (Laughter and applause.) Our second Easter Prayer Breakfast. The Easter Egg Roll, that?s well established. (Laughter.) The Prayer Breakfast we started last year, in part because it gave me a good excuse to bring together people who have been such extraordinary influences in my life and such great friends. And it gives me a chance to meet and make some new friends here in the White House.

I wanted to host this breakfast for a simple reason -? because as busy as we are, as many tasks as pile up, during this season, we are reminded that there?s something about the resurrection -- something about the resurrection of our savior, Jesus Christ, that puts everything else in perspective.

We all live in the hustle and bustle of our work. And everybody in this room has weighty responsibilities, from leading churches and denominations, to helping to administer important government programs, to shaping our culture in various ways. And I admit that my plate has been full as well. (Laughter.) The inbox keeps on accumulating. (Laughter.)

But then comes Holy Week. The triumph of Palm Sunday. The humility of Jesus washing the disciples? feet. His slow march up that hill, and the pain and the scorn and the shame of the cross.

And we?re reminded that in that moment, he took on the sins of the world -- past, present and future -- and he extended to us that unfathomable gift of grace and salvation through his death and resurrection.

In the words of the book Isaiah: ?But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.?
This magnificent grace, this expansive grace, this ?Amazing Grace? calls me to reflect. And it calls me to pray. It calls me to ask God for forgiveness for the times that I?ve not shown grace to others, those times that I?ve fallen short. It calls me to praise God for the gift of our son -- his Son and our Savior.
And that?s why we have this breakfast. Because in the middle of critical national debates, in the middle of our busy lives, we must always make sure that we are keeping things in perspective. Children help do that. (Laughter.) A strong spouse helps do that. But nothing beats scripture and the reminder of the eternal.
So I?m honored that all of you have come here this Holy Week to join me in a spirit of prayer, and I pray that our time here this morning will strengthen us, both individually as believers and as Americans. And with that, let me introduce my good friend, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, for our opening prayer. (Applause.)

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