

Easter Sunday: The Resurrection of the Lord

April 4, 2021 St. Augustine Cathedral 11:30 a.m.

Once again, welcome on this most Glorious Feast of Easter! Welcome to those of you who are here with us in person, and welcome to those of you celebrating virtually with us. Welcome to those who may have traveled back home to visit with family; welcome if this is your first time in Church since the COVID restrictions and have only been able to “be here” virtually; and welcome if you haven’t participated---in person or in any way---if you’ve been away from the regular practice of your Faith. Indeed, welcome to one and all.

As we heard so beautifully proclaimed in our Psalm Response: “*This is the Day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!*”. How can we say that? Because Easter makes all the difference in the world! And so in the name of Father Creagan, Deacon Bodway, and in my own name, I wish you all a very Blessed, Joyful, Hope-filled and Happy Easter!

I’m sure all the children present were excited to jump out of bed early on this gorgeous Spring morning to see what the “Easter Bunny” might have left for them, and I hope that they (and their parents) enjoy all those chocolate bunnies, jelly beans and Easter Eggs! But of course, besides the Candy from the Easter Bunny, and the delicious Easter Foods we all might be looking forward to, the ultimate reason why Easter is the most important Feast of the Year and the central mystery of our Christian Faith, is that because of Jesus’ Suffering, Death and Resurrection, He has confronted, and defeated, the stranglehold that Sin had on humanity, as well as the hope-less conclusion that human death was the end of the story.

Easter celebrates the fact that Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, experienced the worst that the collective Sin of the world could do to anyone, including dying. But on the Third Day, Jesus was gloriously raised. And that makes all the difference in the world---the difference between the old life of despair, defeat and death; and the New Life, filled with Hope, because of Jesus’ Victory---a victory that we share in as well through our Baptism into Christ. And it’s that life-changing Good News which causes us to no longer be able to contain our joyful acclamations that we’ve had to keep silent for these last 40 days of Lent; so we proclaim over and over again: “*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*”!

At last night's Easter Vigil Mass, the joyful Good News of Easter began when this beautiful Candle was lit from the New Fire, and then carried through this totally dark Cathedral proclaiming the joyful proclamation: "***The Light of Christ***". When Jesus rose from Death, He dispelled the darkness that exists, not just in the world, but inside each of us due to sin. We refer to Jesus as the "Light of the World" because He is Alive. And we who have been "enlightened by Christ" are called to live our lives in that same Light.

Easter is the oldest, and most important Feast, in our Christian Faith. To proclaim that Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, suffered, died and was buried is only half of God's powerful Love Story; the other half is that on the Third Day, He was raised to New and unending, Eternal Life. When the holy women that we heard about in this morning's Gospel got to the Tomb and found it open and empty, the Angel inside said: "*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified. He is not here; He has been raised.*" That's the message of Easter; that's the essence of the entire Gospel. But what did that mean? Could it be true---that Jesus is Alive?! Nothing like that had ever happened before----or since, for that matter. It defies human reasoning.

It's interesting that St. Mark tells us at the beginning of this morning's Gospel passage that as the holy women were going to the Tomb on that early Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath, the biggest question on their mind was: "*Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?*" They were certainly not asking one another: "I wonder if Jesus is still there?" That would never have entered their mind. Their beloved Jesus was dead, and buried; it would never have occurred to them that His Body wouldn't be there. But as it turned out, they had really been asking the wrong question, because the Stone had already been moved, and the Tomb was in fact empty. After the Angel told them Jesus wasn't there, he sent them on a mission: "*Go and tell His disciples----and Peter.*" That was the first Easter proclamation.

That's what St. Paul meant in this morning's beautiful Reading from his Letter to the Colossians: "*For you have died with Christ, and with Him your life is joined in God.*" It's our Baptism that brings us into the New Life we live in union with Christ, which is represented here by this Easter Candle!

Last night at the Vigil, I had the privilege of baptizing 3 young adults: each of them in their 20's and 30's---all of them "spiritual" but none of them baptized. It was so moving as each of them pronounced their Baptismal Promises for the first time----that they intend with all their hearts to reject Sin and the power of Satan in their lives; that they believe in God, the Father,

Son and Holy Spirit, and that they intend to live their lives going forward according to the Gospel of Jesus and the teachings of the church! It was moving. And, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it's at moments like that when all of us---baptized years ago, and for many of us a lifetime ago---when we need to pause and remember what being baptized means for us.

Baptism is our common denominator. No matter how old we are, no matter how long we've been baptized, no matter how regularly or irregularly we practice our faith, no matter what title or function we might have in the Church----Bishop, priest, deacon, layperson----all of us are one with each other, and one with Christ through Baptism. And that's why we will renew our Baptismal Promises, as we do every year on Easter, because they remind us who we are, and they challenge us to realize in a new way how important, and special, we are to God. We get the chance to renew our commitment to love God; to be even more determined to reject the power and influence of the Devil in our lives---to reject sin and ward off temptation----to choose to follow Christ, rather than give into the pressures to make choices to do otherwise.

As we look at our world, we realize these are turbulent and difficult times. Aside from the continued hold the Pandemic has on us with all the accompanying anxiety and worry that comes with that, there are so many changes taking place in our world. There are: cultural forces being exerted upon us; social mores that are being transformed; moral standards that are being ignored; political divisions that are causing polarizations; and more and more people ignoring God and God's ways, as humanity seemingly turns a deaf ear and a hardened heart to God's amazing Love Story.

On this Glorious Feast of Easter, let us remember who we are---the Beloved of God our Father, the redeemed and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, and those empowered by God's Holy Spirit. We are the Body of Christ. The holy women on the way to the Tomb really were asking the wrong question as they worried about the Stone in front of the Tomb.

Dear Family of Faith, the power of God's Love has removed the biggest of all obstacles from our lives already---His unconditional Love has overcome the power of sin and Death through Jesus' Resurrection. His abiding Love for us accompanies each of us along our life journeys, and He will never abandon us. That's why Jesus says to us over and over again: "***Do not be afraid!***" Instead of worrying about questions like "who will move the big Rock", perhaps we should focus on the Good News of Easter, and embrace the "Easter Mission" given to the holy women and all of us as Jesus' disciples: "***Go and tell!***".

We do that by living our lives with Hope. We do that by letting the Light of Christ shine in our hearts, and through the actions of our lives. In that way, we too can help to dispel the darkness all around us---the darkness of suffering, of hatred, of violence, of division, and of selfishness.

That's why Easter, and the Easter message, is so important: Jesus isn't among the dead; He has been raised. Go and tell this Good News. To be up for that challenge, though, means that we need one another's support, we need the graces of the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance; we need a life of prayer; and we need the Grace of God that comes to us through our life in the Church.

We have no need to be afraid or feel uncomfortable; we are never alone. We can faithfully, and joyfully, live our Baptismal Promises because we are united with Jesus Himself through Baptism; He is our Food and Drink in the Holy Eucharist; He lives within us thru the power of His Holy Spirit; and He sends us forth in His Name to be His Light in the world.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, living our lives as People of Faith in this world is not only possible, but necessary because of what we celebrate here on this glorious Easter Day, and because of what we hear proclaimed "***Jesus, the Crucified, has been raised.....Go, and tell!***" ***Alleluia!*** **That** is what makes all the difference in the world!

God bless you, now and always!