

Easter – The Resurrection of the Lord – April 11/12, 2020 – Reflection

This Easter is different than any Easter I can remember in my lifetime. Churches are empty. There are no parades, no fancy Easter bonnets, no egg hunts. There're no big family gatherings for the Easter feast. There's no Pope's Mass in Rome, no blessing in St. Peter's Square over thousands of pilgrims. There's no baseball or golf or Stanley Cup playoffs or NBA games. The Easter baskets are less full because the Easter Bunny couldn't get into the stores to shop. Even the Peeps this year are different ... they're wearin' protective masks!

People are afraid: afraid of this damned virus; afraid of getting sick; afraid of losing loved ones. People are afraid that life'll never be the same again; afraid of losing their job, losing their home, losing their income.

Until about a month ago, life was good, the economy was perking right along, unemployment was at an historic low. People felt secure, the country was the greatest in the world, the doctors were making so many advances on all fronts; we could handle anything life threw at us. Then, all of a sudden, everything changed; there was this scourge, this crucifixion of pandemic, and a cloud of fear covered the sunshine of optimism.

People are afraid - and, with good reason!

This Easter is different than any I've seen in my life ... but it's not so different from the very first Easter. Those who were closest to Jesus,

His disciples, His friends were very afraid after the Lord's crucifixion. They doubted everything they had come to believe about Him ... he was their leader, their Rabbi, their Master, their Lord, their Savior, and now, He was just dead and buried. They were afraid that if such horror could befall Him, their lives weren't worth much either. They were afraid persecution and crosses and death were the only things in their future; the light had gone out on their hope.

All through lent, we have been listening to Jesus' Last Words, His last sermon delivered from the cross: "Father, forgive them ..."; "Woman, behold your son ..."; "I thirst"; "Today you'll be with me in Paradise"; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"; "It is finished"; "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" ... last words from a dying man. Why are they important? It's because of the first words the Risen Son of Man, Son of God spoke to His still fearful and incredulous disciples: "Be not afraid!" Death is not the ultimate power ... I have conquered death and, in me, you shall too. The body can suffer pain and injury, but in me, your body will rise. The forces of evil are powerful, but in me, you can overcome and conquer. Be not afraid, in all things I am with you, even to the end of the age. I will walk with you, even if you walk through the valley of darkness, even if you cross a barren desert, pass through raging waters, walk amid burning flames, even if you stand before the power of hell, be not afraid, I am with you through it all.

Back in the fall of 1978, a man from Poland stood on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and introduced himself to the world as the successor to Peter with these words: "I plead with you - never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid.

Be not afraid to be holy. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.
Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ.

The stone is moved. The tomb is open and empty. He is Risen!

Be not afraid!