“DO NOT BE AFRAID”

The year was 1978. The white smoke above St. Peter’s announced to the world that a new pope had been elected by the College of Cardinals. He was from Poland, educated, vibrant, bright with a vision for a new world reflecting the suffering in his native land. He would take the Papal name, John Paul II. Suddenly a cardinal relatively unknown outside Poland became the Holy Father of the Catholic global believers. All the world waited to hear his first words, his first sermon, his first papal address, for it would likely set the direction and the style of his papacy. One Pope, two names, John and Paul to protect, guide and inspire him. And here were Pope John Paul’s first words on his first public appearance addressed to the world: “Be not afraid”.

At the Annunciation the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God....” The angel said to Joseph in a dream, “Do not be afraid, Joseph to take Mary as your wife...” At the birth of Jesus, the angels said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, this day in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you...”

When the apostles saw him after his resurrection by the sea of Galilee, they thought they were seeing a ghost, Jesus said to them, “It is I, do not be afraid”. While crossing the Sea of Galilee during a fierce storm, they woke him up, and Jesus addressed them by the same encouraging words.

This Easter season 2020, the whole world is passing through a deadly storm. We need to hear the reassuring words of our Risen Savior, “Do not be afraid. Peace be with you.” Luke 24:36.

The first time after his resurrection when the apostles were terrified behind locked doors, Jesus gave them the salutation of peace. The second time was a week later when Thomas was with them. Jesus showed them his hands and his feet which had been pierced with nails on the cross, and then his side which had been opened with a lance saying to them, “Touch me and look, a spirit has no flesh and bones, as you see that I have.” Luke 24:39.

It is very likely that the frightened apostles actually had touched the glorious body of Jesus. This might explain why Thomas later demanded such a privilege. He would not be inferior to the rest; therefore, he said, “Unless I touch...and see...I will not believe”.
This Easter why are these words a message for us? Because Jesus is inviting us to face our fear with the hope of the Easter joy. Fear makes us withdraw and even reject our loved ones and puts us in a corner in a fetal position with no incentive to get away and to return back to normal life and to our loved ones.

The message of this Easter is from the wish of Our Risen Savior to the women who first saw him: “Do not be afraid, go tell my disciples to go to Galilee, there they will see me”.

Heavenly Father, healer of body and soul, have mercy on the whole earth, possessed by anguish, fear, doubt, sickness and death. Give us courage to trust in your power, dispel the darkness covering the world. Calm the storms threatening our lives. You wanted your beloved apostles to go to Galilee to see you. Hear our prayers that we may go to church where we can see you, talk to you, and receive you in Holy Communion. May this Easter season replace our fear with courage, joy, love and peace. Lord God, do not let our fear overcome our faith. Amen

Msgr. Publius