

***"So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples."
(Matthew 28:8)***



Dear friends,

The Gospel for this year's Easter Vigil underscores both the fear and the joy that was present among the first witnesses of the resurrection and continues to be our feelings today when we seek to witness to Christ who is among us. Jesus reassures us with the words "Do not be afraid".

At the conclusion of each Eucharistic celebration, when we are dismissed with the words *Go and proclaim the Gospel of the Lord*, we are, in a certain sense, re-enacting what happened at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, over 2000 years ago with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. These women encountered Christ and were sent forth, with fear and joy, to tell others. They went forth as witnesses, as disciples on mission – missionary disciples.

What is this source of fear that the women experienced? Perhaps it is the fear that their credibility will be questioned and that the message will be rejected by those who receive it? Perhaps they wonder if what they have heard and seen isn't true and was only imagined? Perhaps they fear that they will be harmed by the forces that brought about the death of Jesus? Perhaps it was simply the fear of the unknown. There were no doubt a myriad of reasons for their fears that Easter morning.

Yet, at the same time, their fear was tempered by an immense joy. Suddenly, in the midst of their profound grief, they encounter Christ who tells them, *"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

(Matthew 28:10). The joy that springs from this encounter compels them to go and proclaim the Good News. It is a joy that cannot possibly be contained and so they run to find the Apostles, who had taken shelter in fear for their lives, to tell them

"He is risen"

! It was a joy rooted in hope. A joy steeped in the awareness that God's love knows no bounds.

Like the women who encounter the risen Christ, we too are often filled with fear. We fear that our proclamation will be rejected and not considered credible especially in times of prosperity when people feel that they do not need God or in times of desperation and suffering as we are experiencing today with the COVID-19 crisis. With this surprising pandemic, many are fearful of the long-term job loss and are worried about how they will pay their rent, feed their children and meet their responsibilities with diminished financial resources. For some, such as those who are in hospital and long-term care facilities, their fear of isolation is particularly increased when they are told that they cannot receive visitors. Parents are struggling to find ways to explain the crisis of the Coronavirus to their children whose daily routines have been radically changed. For the Christian community, faced with the prospect of not being able to gather together in parishes to celebrate Easter, *"the heart of the entire liturgical year"*, questions arise about how to mark the Easter Triduum in our families in meaningful ways. How can we live as a truly domestic church at home during this time of crisis?

How do we address our fears? How do we console one another during these times? We, like the women who encountered Christ at the tomb, must respond by going forth in joy, confident that it is the Risen Christ who sends us, accompanies us and reassures us. As we experience physical distancing, self-isolation, quarantine and economic uncertainty, we are compelled to find new ways to proclaim the Good News that Christ is Risen. As Peter tells us *"always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you."* (1 Peter 3:15). Now more than ever, we must be Easter people who proclaim that Christ is Risen, He has saved us from our sins and He is with us always!

As people of faith, our fear gives way to joy in our daily encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, in Spiritual Communion, in the Scriptures, in our prayer, in devotions such as the Rosary, and in compassionate and loving service to one another. These encounters, even if by social media, provide us with the courage and conviction of our faith so that, even in these most challenging times, we can boldly proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ through our words and

actions. He has set us free from sin and death and we share with Him the same mission prophesized by Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and of recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Isaiah 61: 1-2)

When we address our fears through the eyes of faith, we are freed to bring about authentic and lasting spiritual and social transformation by addressing the injustices around us, but also by discerning the signs of the times, for God's presence is active and saving at each moment of our daily lives.

As we celebrate Easter, we are reminded of the Paschal Candle from which the candle given to us at our baptism was lit, making us bearers of Christ's light sent forth as missionary disciples to bring His light to the world. As Easter people, we have encountered the risen Christ. We acknowledge Him and we proclaim Him. He has called us and we are free to follow Him. Let us do so, ever more faithfully, keeping our eyes fixed on His light which shines on our path. Let us go forth to tell the Lord's brothers and sisters that the Kingdom is near, that He himself is the Kingdom risen and alive for all eternity.

Wishing you and all your loved ones a blessed and happy Easter.

+Richard Gagnon

Archbishop of Winnipeg and

President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Easter 2020

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