

April 12, 2020 St. Augustine Cathedral (Livestreaming) 10:00 a.m.

Easter Sunday the Resurrection of the Lord

On this glorious Easter morning, on behalf of those few of us actually here in our Cathedral Church, I want to extend to all of you who are virtually joining us from wherever you are my heartfelt greetings and prayerful good wishes for a very Happy Easter! I also want to say, and I know I'm speaking on behalf of all the priests of our Diocese, that we very much miss being able to be with all of you, the People of God, with whom we are traveling this Journey of Faith together.

This Holy Week has been a beautiful celebration of our Faith, from last Sunday's Palm Sunday, thru Tuesday's beautiful Chrism Mass, and now completing the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, last night's beautiful Easter Vigil, and this Easter Sunday Mass today. But each of these celebrations, though beautiful in what we celebrate, has been bittersweet because we have been separated from all of you.

And that separation is even more keenly felt this morning, when we're all used to our churches being filled, and usually filled to overflowing. I'm also quite sure that you too miss being here, and that you especially miss being able to receive the Holy Eucharist.

But, in spite of these circumstances, Easter still remains our most special Feast of the entire Liturgical Year, the Feast around which everything else revolves, and the Feast which is the reason why we are Catholics---Christians---followers of Christ, Who has conquered the power of sin and death, and Who has won for all of us a share in that great Victory. And so, in spite of the sadness of separation, I hope that our hearts can truly be filled with Joy, and that our whole beings can shout the acclamation that has been silent for these 40 days of Lent: "Alleluia!" Jesus is Risen, Alleluia! He is truly risen, Alleluia!

My sister was telling me yesterday that she was talking with her eight year old grandson, Cameron, a good Catholic school student, who sometime after all these restrictions, will be receiving his First Holy Communion. Cameron said: "Grandma, tomorrow morning when I wake up the first thing I'm going to do is say the "A—" word. And she said, "What 'A—" word?" And he said, I can't tell you. Then he asked his mother if he could say it? And she said, No, you haven't said it all thru Lent, you can do it one more day. And he said: "But I don't know if my mouth will be able to keep it in much longer!" Wouldn't it be nice if we could all feel like that---

that we find it hard to keep within us the songs of praise that we want to proclaim for all the world to hear because Jesus has risen, just as He promised. Alleluia!

But perhaps the very reasons why we're not able to be together---and because there's so much about what's happening in the world on our minds and weighing on our hearts----maybe that's why our "Alleluia's" might not be as enthusiastic as they might otherwise be.

Actually, when we think about the first Easter, as we just heard it in today's Gospel passage according to St. Matthew, there wasn't a lot of "Alleluia's" being shouted there either, nor was there much Joy being felt. And the reason for that is because nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of humankind. Death was the one certainty; it was the ultimate end to human life. So when the holy women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, were coming to the Tomb, they were going there to see if He was still there. No, they were going to anoint Jesus' dead Body and grieve together there for a while.

Matthew describes in great detail what they experienced: "*there was a great earthquake*", which appears to have been caused by an "*Angel of the Lord*", who as Matthew told us "*descended from Heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.*" Both women, as well as the guards, saw this taking place; Matthew tells us they *were shaken with fear...and became like dead men.*" Then the Angel delivered the Good News: "*Do not be afraid!---Jesus the Crucified is not here; He has been raised.*" And then he invited them to come and look into the Tomb for themselves and to see that it was empty.

So, while from our perspective 2,000 years later, we'd be expecting them to be jumping up and down with joy, Matthew tells us that they were "*fearful yet overjoyed.*" And then the Angel sent the holy women to share this first Easter message: *Go quickly and tell Jesus' disciples: 'He has been raised from the dead'.*"

That's the essential Easter message. It's recorded with slight variations in each of the 4 Gospel accounts, but the message remains shocking, and one never before proclaimed: Jesus was dead and buried; but 3 days later, the Tomb is empty, and He has been raised!

That IS shocking. It would cause anyone to be "fearful, yet overjoyed". It would take a while for the "Alleluia's" to begin being proclaimed; it would take a while for people to begin jumping for Joy!

Despite this world-wide pandemic, and the quarantines, restrictions, and isolation that we're all experiencing, it's still Easter! So, we need to proclaim our Alleluia's, even if we have to try a littler harder, and even though we can't come together to celebrate the greatest Feast of our Faith. In fact, this Easter message is absolutely critical for all of us to hear, especially during these days when fear, anxiety and a sense of vulnerability rests heavily in our hearts. As the holy women were going to find the Disciples (who, by the way, were also self-quarantined out of fear that they could be the next ones to be killed, as their Master had been), St. Matthew tells us that *"Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced His feet, and did Him homage. Then Jesus said to them: 'Do not be afraid! Go, tell my brothers.'"*

In the midst of our fears, the Risen Jesus tells us the same thing: "Do not be afraid!" As Jesus reminded the holy women, and His disciples, Jesus also tells all of us that His Resurrection proves that: God's Life is stronger than human Death; Jesus' Love conquers Hatred and Violence; and Hope rooted in Jesus' Spirit defeats our sense of discouragement. Or as St. Paul put it in today's Second Reading: *"If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right Hand of God."*

We're all too aware that our lives have changed significantly during these past 3 weeks, and we will continue to be restricted while we all continue doing all that we can to "stop the spread" of this deadly virus. But rather than focusing just on what we can't do---the "fearful" part---I think it's also important to look for what some of the positive outcomes from all this are---the "overjoyed" part, if you will.

I've been noticing that most of us are becoming more aware of what's truly important in life; that our priorities are getting re-ordered; that we're not taking one another for granted as much as we might have done in the past.

I think that, besides being concerned about ourselves and our own families, there's more of a genuine concern for others' well-being---checking on our neighbors, being mindful of others' circumstances.

There definitely appears to be a greater sense of compassion for people's suffering everywhere, no matter who they are, what country they're from, and despite their race, religion or national origin. We seem to be more aware that we're part of the human family, because what is affecting us, is affecting everyone, everywhere.

There's much more conversation about ways we can help one another, and much less conversation on building wall to divide us from one another.

There's a greater awareness of our own, fragile human nature, and I am convinced that more and more people are finding their way back to God, praying for God's guidance, strength and deliverance.

And in these circumstances, of both feeling "fearful" because of these unprecedented, world-wide circumstances, but also being "overjoyed" at the meaning of Easter which has changed the world forever, we continue to hear the original Easter message: "*Do not be afraid! Go, and tell this Good News to one another.*" So, while we look forward to the end of this pandemic, and an end to all the restrictions, and getting back to some normalcy, including being able to come together to celebrate our Faith and receive the Eucharist, I hope we don't go back to the way things were in terms of attitudes that divide us; but rather that we continue to focus on what unites us.

Since we are unable to come to Easter Mass and receive the Sacraments, we need to find alternate ways to demonstrate that we are "Easter People". I have therefore been encouraging everyone to find a way to "Let Jesus' Light Shine". You can do so by illuminating your homes with special lights; by decorating your lawns with the Cross or other Christian symbols. But mostly you can show that you are followers of Jesus, the *Light of the World*, by "Letting Jesus' Light Shine" through your very lives---in what you say, in how you act, in the choices that you make when this pandemic is over. We can do that in the new ways that we try to avoid "regressing" back to the way things were before, but instead, "renewing" ourselves to live in the newness of Christ's Love. "Let Jesus' Light Shine" is much more than a slogan. It's the summary of the Exultet which we proclaimed at last night's beautiful Easter Vigil, as Christ dispels the darkness of our world, the effects of sin, and the ultimate power of death. Jesus the Crucified is not dead in a Tomb; He has been raised.

If that good news touches your heart, and calls you to live your life in new ways, then join Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, join with the Apostles and the first band of disciples, and rejoice in the Good News of the Risen Jesus: "*Do not be afraid! Go, and tell this Good News to all your sisters and brothers*". And don't keep it in any longer: say the "A-word" to everyone, everywhere: Alleluia!!! Jesus Christ is risen; He is truly risen! Alleluia!