

Homily - Easter Sunday 2024

Christ is risen, alleluia!

My friends, the feast we celebrate today is a day that is different from any other day.

It is, by any measure, the most important day in human history - in fact, it is the climactic event of what we call salvation history - the day when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, triumphed over sin and death and rose from the grave.

Today, two millennia distant from that incredible day, it's hard to appreciate the significance or the power of this first Gospel message.

But let's take a moment to try.

I want you to try to imagine the strangeness of that first Easter morning, as the news of his Resurrection began to spread.

After all, if there was one thing that nobody had any doubt about in their minds, it was that they had seen Jesus of Nazareth die on the cross.

The fact was well-known - the news had spread.

Days later, on the road to Emmaus, his disciples would ask, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

For all the apostles knew, the movement Jesus had started was now doomed to disappear, like those of so many other would-be Messiahs.

But something was different this time.

Mary Magdalene, who would come to be revered as the 'apostle to the apostles,' was the first to see the stone rolled from the tomb.

And the first people to hear the news were Christ's closest friends.

Peter, the apostle who had been promised by Jesus that he would become the rock upon which the Church itself would stand, but in the fear and doubt of the Lord's suffering and crucifixion had denied him three times, and was now wracked with shame and guilt.

And John, the beloved disciple, the contemplative, who knew the heart of his Divine Master and had waited at the foot of his Cross until the bitter end.

You can imagine all the thoughts and emotions that were going through their minds as they ran to the tomb.

And there it was: the open door to the tomb.

The folded burial cloths, deliberately set aside by the one whom they could no longer hold.

The power of death was broken, and the Lord had triumphed over the grave.

There was still confusion, of course. The apostles wouldn't fully understand what had happened until they saw Jesus again face to face.

But they were beginning to hope again. The light had returned to their lives, and their hearts.

As I said, I want you to imagine that feeling, because in a way, we are sharing today in that same first proclamation of the Resurrection.

We are hearing that good news as though for the very first time.

But do we believe it? Do we understand what it means to say that Christ truly is risen - that as we proclaimed in the renewal of our baptismal promises, that he truly lived, died, and rose again to new life?

To be a Christian, one who claims the name of a follower of Jesus Christ, is to proclaim by our words and our lives that the faith handed down to us from age to age by the apostles and their successors is not a fiction, a fairy tale, a metaphor, a cute story, or a philosophical parable, it is real, living, breathing, walking, historical *fact*.

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and he did rise from the dead, then what he said and taught is true: there is a Kingdom of Heaven, and it is worth living, fighting, and dying for.

And if the Gospel is true, then in that dying and rising, we have the chance to be free. Free from the pain that we carry.

Free from the threat of obliteration and death, that darkness that we fear to confront or acknowledge.

Free from sin, the corruption that touches all our best intentions and dearest treasures, and turns them away from their true purpose and destiny.

How will we respond to that news?

Do we believe it? Can we bring ourselves to try? Is that joy, the dawning joy of his friends and apostles, present in your heart today?

Have we lost sight of that belief in the middle of all the pressures, conflicts, temptations, and wounds of our daily lives?

My friends, wherever you are right now, whatever burdens you have carried leading up to this Easter morning, the Lord wants to give you a beautiful gift, through the power of his Resurrection.

He wants to give you hope.

Hope is, in the mind of our faith, not mere wishful thinking or irrational optimism.

Hope is confidence. Hope is trust in a promise made by someone worth trusting, that the Lord's promise of eternal life is real, and it is beautiful, more than we can understand.

Hope is the knowledge that where our strength fails as we strive for holiness and freedom, the love and strength of God will be enough.

Like his friends who heard that first proclamation of the Gospel message, we may still have questions to answer and doubts to face on the path back to his love.

But for today, all that is needed is that we give him the chance to unfold that mystery, to trust that our Risen Lord is risen indeed, and he wants us to share in that joy.

Today, as we celebrate this beautiful day of grace, and are renewed by his Body and Blood in this Holy Eucharist, let's each resolve to live this joy in our own lives and homes, and to turn back to him with our whole mind, heart, and will.

Today, like his friends and apostles, we resolve to proclaim his Gospel with our words, our actions, and our lives.

For our world will never be the same - because Christ is risen; he is risen indeed, alleluia!