

EASTER SUNDAY
April 4, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

On this most sacred day, we celebrate the greatest feast of the year, the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When Jesus rose from the dead, on that first Easter morning, He conquered the grave, and thereby conquered sin and death, and redeemed the world. This is what we celebrate at Easter – the Lord’s victory, and our redemption.

Today is the culmination of the solemn days we have been observing as a Church. We passed through the drama of Holy Thursday night, a night “charged with mystery,”¹ when Our Lord instituted the Eucharist and the priesthood, just before He was betrayed by one of His closest followers. On Good Friday, with broken hearts, we remembered the terrible sufferings Our Lord endured out of love for us and *because* of us, and we felt the darkness of our guilt, but also the awe of His mercy and love. And then yesterday, on Holy Saturday, we felt the weight of the silence, the stillness and the emptiness in the world, as the King slept in death.

But today, at last, we are permitted to let our hearts be filled with gladness and joy, as we celebrate Our Lord’s victory over death. The great King who slept in death has risen, and *He is alive!* Until now, we contemplated Him in His sorrowful Passion, but now we contemplate Him risen and glorified, seated on His throne in Heaven and reigning in glory over the whole world, and our hearts are filled with joy, because we know that He offers each of us a share in His great victory.

One of the reasons our hearts should be filled with joy at Easter is that we know we no longer need to fear death. During this past year of pandemic, so many people have been gripped by fear. One of the things we priests have heard so often is, “*Father, I’m so afraid!*” People have heard of the suffering of those who died from the virus, and they have been gripped with fear of catching the virus. And this fear has had all sorts of sad consequences in people’s lives.

But, the solemnity of Easter reminds us that we don’t have to fear death. We who have faith in Christ and believe in His Resurrection know that, even if we die, if we are faithful to Christ, we will live forever with Him in Heaven. For, Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies,*

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Holy Thursday Letter to Priests* (2000), #2.

will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”² Because of the Resurrection, the gates of Paradise are now open and death is no longer to be feared, for those who believe in Christ. For, “[w]e know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.”³ “If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”⁴ So, even though we may still die, we Christians should no longer *fear* death. Before that first Easter, death was endless and futile, but now it is the doorway to eternal life. And, this is why we join St. Paul in taunting death by saying: “*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*”⁵

The celebration of Easter should change the way we look at death. It should give our Christian souls courage to face death with peace and serenity. For those who *don't* believe in Christ or the Resurrection, death appears only as the end of our lives, when everything just goes dark and we cease to exist. And so, it is often approached with great fear and even dread. But, for us who believe in Christ, the Resurrection means that death is *not* the end, that there *is* life after death – an *eternal* life of happiness and joy. For those who believe in Christ, death is only the moment when we close our eyes on this passing life and open them on the next. Death is not to be feared, because it is the doorway to eternal life. When Christ rose from the dead, He made salvation possible for all of us; and, because Christ is risen, we can now live this life here on earth with great hope for eternal life and even a holy eagerness to be with God.

As the angel said to the women at the empty tomb: “*Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him.*”⁶

Christ is risen, as He said, Alleluia! Yes, He is truly risen, Alleluia!

² Jn 11:25-26.

³ Rom 6:9.

⁴ Rom 6:8.

⁵ 1Cor 15:55.

⁶ Mk 16:6.