

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Easter Sunday 2019

Easter Sunday

Basilica of the Assumption

Apr. 21, 2019

Through Peter's Eyes

When tragedy strikes, such as today's church and hotel bombings in Sri Lanka that killed more than 200 people, our mobile devices and flat screens light up with instant images. Those terrible images of bloodshed and destruction speak for themselves and they prompt us to pray for our fellow worshippers who have lost their lives. Yet, we will also want to hear from those who witnessed those events, those who can help us grapple with such senseless acts of violence.

The same is true when the notable event is a happy one. Last weekend, Tiger Woods won the Masters Tournament in Augusta. Spectators and fans who saw him sink the winning putt knew that this was not only a golfing triumph but a personal triumph. His victory spoke for itself and yet we wanted to hear more. We wanted insight and analysis from those who understand professional golf; we wanted to understand, as it were, the inner-workings of Tiger's victory.

Is it any different this morning? The Scriptures, the Tradition, and the Liturgy proclaim with one voice the most astonishing, unheard-of event in the history of the human race: The Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you are a believing Christian, then the Resurrection is at the heart of your faith. If you practice your faith avidly, the Resurrection is at the center of your life. When Scripture, Tradition, and Liturgy attest that Jesus is risen from the dead, we do not see the Risen Lord physically, but we do see him with the eyes of faith. The Resurrection, the triumph of Jesus over sin and death, speaks for itself and yet we want to hear more; we want to hear from an eyewitness, someone who knew Jesus and who might teach us what this event really means. That person, I would suggest, is the Apostle Peter. On this Easter morning, let us see the Resurrection through the

eyes of Peter.

The Resurrection of Peter's Heart

At this point you might want to raise an objection. Why Peter? Didn't Peter frequently misunderstand the nature of Jesus mission? Didn't he deny Jesus three times in the midst of his Passion? You might think that the sinless Blessed Virgin Mary would make a better witness; or perhaps John, the beloved disciple, who stayed with Jesus throughout his ordeal. They are the best of witnesses, I would agree, but I'm sticking with Peter because he is more like us in his slowness to understand and in his betrayal of Jesus as he was being sentenced to death. I'm sticking with Peter because, what happened to him can happen to us.

And what happened in the life of St. Peter? Peter truly had misunderstood the Lord's mission and even tried to talk him out of it. And, just as the Lord had predicted, Peter disowned Jesus three times in courtyard. But we love Peter nonetheless! We love him for the goodness of his flawed humanity and for his initiative: After betraying Jesus, Peter wept bitter tears of repentance. And, when Mary Magdalene brought him the news that Jesus was not in his tomb, Peter did not stand pat in disbelief, in hopelessness, or inaction; nor was he weighed down by the gloomy atmosphere among his fellow disciples. On the contrary, Peter and the beloved disciple, making room for hope in their hearts, ran to the tomb to investigate the report of Mary Magdalene. ... Imagine the wonder and awe that filled the heart of Peter when he went into the tomb to see the burial cloths neatly stashed - not the work of grave robbers but evidence that the Lord had indeed been raised. Neither Peter nor John understood what it meant that their beloved Lord would rise from the dead, yet, at that moment, they were confronted with the immense mystery of the Resurrection.

Over the course of the next forty days, Jesus appeared to his disciples - forgiving their betrayals while granting them power to forgive sin; inviting the doubting Thomas to place his finger in the wounded side; eating and drinking with his astonished apostles, instructing them in the Scriptures, and allowing them to see him and to know his Presence in the Breaking of Bread. But Peter, who denied him three times, was singled out for special consideration. Jesus asked him three times,

“Do you love me?” and told him three times to tend his sheep.

As all of this unfolded, Peter experienced what Pope Francis called, “a resurrection of the heart”. The Holy Spirit began to invade his heart and to open him to the truth: the truth of who Jesus was and is; the truth of his preaching and the power of his miracles; the utter generosity and mercy of his crucified love; the power of the Resurrection over sin and death. As Jesus ascended into heaven and as the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, the resurrection of Peter’s heart was in full bloom. We see this in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles. No longer misunderstanding, no longer fearful, no longer centered on himself, Peter proceeds to announce boldly the Gospel of Christ: “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day... ..everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.” This, my friends, is the witness of a heart resurrected!

The Resurrection of Our Hearts

If a man like Peter, fallible and impulsive, could experience a resurrection of the heart, so too you and I can also experience a resurrection of the heart. There are many things weighing down on our hearts this morning: the burden of own betrayals and sins; the problems and dangers we and our loved ones are facing; the gloomy atmosphere of secular culture that makes little room for faith & hope; the negative peer pressure that hinders us from saying “yes” to the Risen Lord; the cloud of scandal created by the sins of clergy and the inaction of bishops. Many factors can weigh down our hearts and imprison them in virtual disbelief.

Observing Peter’s zigzag journey to discipleship and courageous witness, we realize that the Lord can work in us and in our times and in our circumstances. Already we have been baptized into the Lord’s Death and Resurrection. Already we have taken part in the Banquet of Christ’s Sacrifice, the Holy Mass. Available to us at all times is the Sacrament of Reconciliation by which we obtain the forgiveness of our sins so as to renew our friendship with God. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord can be active in our hearts no less than he was active in bringing Peter’s heart to a new birth of holiness. Moments from now we will renew our baptismal promises: we will renounce Satan and the glamour of evil; we will profess anew our faith in God, in his

Crucified and Risen Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Church born from side of the Crucified Lord. Let not our response to those questions be rote or routine, but heartfelt. When we answer, "I do", let those two little words signal a resurrection in our hearts: a surge of faith, a rebirth of hope, a renewal in love – such that we too, like Peter, will find the strength and courage to embrace Jesus by praying daily, by attending Mass every Sunday, by making regular use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, by turning our lives around and opening them in love to others, especially the poor, by bearing witness to Jesus and to our faith even when it isn't popular.

"Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining. Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning! Amen. Alleluia!"