

# Easter Sunday 2015

## **Introduction**

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to see all you here this morning. Some of you are here every Sunday, others occasionally; others may be visiting from out-of-town; and some of you might be making your semi-annual visit to church. Whatever your circumstances, you are very welcome not only in this historic basilica, our nation's first Catholic cathedral, but indeed in the heart, mind, and soul of the Roman Catholic Church. The welcome I extend is truly personal but even more so, in spite of my own weakness and limitations, I have the privilege of extending to you the loving embrace of Risen Christ, the same loving embrace I am seeking in my own life; in his Spirit, I bid you welcome.

## **Healing, Hope, and Joy**

So what is this day called Easter all about, anyway? To be sure, Easter is that day when Christians everywhere celebrate the bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But what message do we glean from the Scriptures and the liturgy this morning? Dare I reduce this message to three little words: healing, hope, and joy? Nothing I can say does justice to the Resurrection but let me suggest that these three little words help us understand what we celebrate today, and why. So without further ado, let's begin with the message of healing.

## **Healing**

A message of healing implies we have wounds, and we do. Some of these wounds are writ large such as terrorism, the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, and the deliberate downing of the German airliner. Other wounds are more personal, closer to home, such as physical and emotional illnesses or broken relationships in families. Still other wounds run deeper, the deep spiritual wounds caused by our sins. Wounds – we all have them – me and you, everyone we know.

Truly to heal these wounds, we look both for meaning and for love. In the face of tragedies and those things we find hardest to face, we want to know that our lives have meaning and that we are loved. Without love our lives make no sense.

Jesus, God's Son came into the world and became one of us, to show us that we are

loved, and loved infinitely, by God and created for friendship with God. On the Cross he shouldered the entire sum of human frailty and sinfulness. By rising from the dead, he opened for you and me the path to healing. He emerged from the tomb not merely as a deceased individual coming back to life. No, his risen humanity was resplendent with the glory of God's self-giving love. Jesus did not promise us a life free of problems, worries, and even tragedies. Rather, the Risen Lord manifested an obedient and merciful love that can heal our wounded freedom, if we allow him to do so, especially by participating regularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Imagine the freedom to find God's love in every aspect of our lives. Imagine how such freedom would reshape our thoughts, decisions, and relationships.

## **Hope**

Because the Resurrection is the source of our deepest healing, it is also source of our highest hope. St. Paul puts it this way in today's reading from Colossians: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth." (Col. 3:1-2).

In the Risen Lord we encounter a love stronger than our sins and more powerful than death itself. As that love takes hold in our lives and heals us of our sins, our horizons expand. Baptism introduces new & definitive principle of life into our ordinary daily lives, namely, the prospect of sharing an endless life of infinite love. When we take it seriously and allow it to grow, we discover something wonderful. No longer do we feel boxed in by the problems we are dealing with. No longer do we feel defined by the sum of our sins and weaknesses. No longer do we define success and happiness in a self-centered way. Our real-life situation may improve or worsen but when we are overtaken by hope, what changes, even dramatically, is our interior outlook and outward demeanor. We sense that God is with us; that he cares for us; that he is even rooting for us and that, for all its magnitude and force, sin and death do not have the upper hand. In the face of the problems and decisions that confront us, we see the opportunity not merely to conform ourselves to some arbitrary rule, but rather to advance along the path of truth and love, such that even now we begin to love God and others as we will love them in heaven. Pope Benedict famously said that, "one who has hope, lives differently" (Spe Salvi). This is why St. Paul tells us this Easter morn "to seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:2). This is why Pope Francis urges us to be "lights of hope" in the

world.

## **Joy**

Healing and hope lead to joy – St. Paul sums it up so nicely: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12). What brings about our healing, drives our hope, and causes our joy is the reality encountered by Mary Magdalen, Simon Peter, and the Beloved Disciple: the empty tomb, the rolled up burial cloths, the cloth that had covered Jesus head. “They saw and they believed.”

For forty days thereafter the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples. Glorified in his risen body, He nonetheless did not come to them as a vision or a ghost. Jesus would accompany two disciples on the road to Emmaus, breathe on the Apostles in the Upper Room, giving them power to forgive sins, invite the doubting Thomas to touch the wounds in his hands, his feet, his side, cook breakfast for the disciples on the seashore, speak to them words of spirit and life and commission them to preach the Gospel. Even in their fear and confusion, their joy, their amazement knew no bounds, for the disciples soon realized in faith that the Risen Lord was with them more profoundly and more beautifully than ever before. The preaching of Peter recounted in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives evidence of the profound, life-changing encounter with the Risen Lord, which he and the other Apostles experienced.

“Sometimes,” Pope Francis tells us, “we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met” (EG, no. 7). Yet the key to a joy that is ever new is our own encounter with the Risen Lord... whose ‘steadfast love never ceases’; whose ‘mercies are new every morning.’ ‘Rejoicing in hope, being patient in suffering, persevering in prayer’ – we find the greatest peace and joy as our friendship with the Risen Lord blossoms, as we encounter that love that enables us to “become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves to attain the fullest truth of our being” (8). This is the joy we absorb from daily, living contact with the Lord risen in our humanity!

## **Conclusion**

So the message of the Resurrection is one of healing, hope, and joy, and we might be

tempted to leave it right there as a few nice thoughts for Easter summed up in the phrase, "Nice sermon, Father." But you and I don't need mere nice words, we need healing, hope, and joy. If ever there were a reason for coming to Mass each Sunday, for praying each day, for studying our faith, and striving to live it intentionally, this is it! St. John Paul II once said that in worthily receiving the Eucharist, the true Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, as it were we "digest the secret of the Resurrection" - (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 18) we deepen in ourselves, body and soul, that new principle of life, that new source of love; we tap into that love stronger than sin and death that enables us to love now as we will love in heaven.

The Lord is Risen! Indeed He is truly Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!