

# Friday Octave of Easter - Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

## **I. Introduction**

What a joy it is to begin this Board meeting with all of you during these days of the Paschal Octave: the week following Easter Sunday. Indeed, the joy of Easter is so great that the Church celebrates each of these eight days as if each day were Easter Sunday. So I hasten to wish you, on this Friday morning, a Happy Easter!

## **II. The Resurrection is Something New**

The readings the Church sets before us, during these days of the Paschal Octave, stir in our souls the joy and wonder of the first disciples as it gradually began to dawn on them that Christ was truly risen, and what that meant.

You and I believe that the Lord has truly risen from the dead; we celebrate the Resurrection each year at this time and indeed, every Sunday; in that sense the idea of rising from the dead has become familiar to us. Yet if a deceased friend suddenly visited us, we'd be astonished beyond telling. Christmas, on the other hand, is somewhat easier to understand than Easter is: we've all seen newborn babies, we've held them in our arms; and we can easily imagine the scene with the manger and the shepherds. But when we think about Resurrection, it's difficult even to conceptualize. And to those first disciples, the idea of coming back from the dead was something inconceivable . . . even if Jesus had told them, before the fact, that the Son of Man would suffer, die, and rise from dead.

Jesus gave them other indicators of what was coming. He raised the son of the widow of Naim from dead and, of course, he brought his friend Lazarus out of the grave. Yet even those miracles were different from the Resurrection. Those people were restored to their earthly lives, and they all eventually died again. When Jesus brought them back to life, these miracles were akin to resuscitation. But the Resurrection is something different from resuscitation. Jesus introduces something stunningly new into human existence: he is raised to a new life, and death no longer has power over him. This means that, for the first time in human existence, the grave does not have the final word. Here is the foundation of our faith and our hope.

This is why the Gospel we hear and the faith we profess is always new.

### **III. Fire and Light from Heaven**

Even we cannot fully understand the Resurrection from our vantage point on this side of eternity; we nonetheless can begin to approach and even take part in this mystery through the signs and symbols of the liturgy and the Church's sacramental life. For instance, during the Easter Season, in every church in which the Easter Vigil was celebrated, there stands the eloquent symbol of the Paschal Candle.

Saint Gregory of Tours, who lived in the fourth century, tells us of a tradition in the early Church whereby the new Easter fire would be lit directly from a sun, using a crystal. This was a way of expressing their hope newly kindled from heaven in Christ, the Resurrection and the Life. So too for us, the new fire and the brightly burning flame of the Easter Candle, announces that fire and light from Heaven have come to us anew, in the victory of Christ over sin and death.

Fire and light from Heaven: the fire of love, and the light of truth. Love and truth shine forth from the Risen Christ as he makes present the fire of the Holy Spirit which alone is able to melt through the frozenness of indifference. Indeed He is the light which alone can scatter the murky gloom which hangs over men and women who have never really encountered the Lord, who "dwell in darkness and the shadow of death (Job 3:5; Lk 1:79)."

Indeed, the Risen Christ teaches us that love and truth always go together. As Blessed John Paul II put it, "Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth. One without the other becomes a destructive lie."<sup>1</sup>

Even though there is no Paschal Candle at our Mass this morning, let's dwell on it a little more so as to draw out a further point for meditation. We notice that, as with all candles, that the Paschal Candle is consumed as it gives off its light to the world. Christ, the Light of the World, offers Himself, is consumed, as He gives Himself in love to us. His Love, and His mercy, come at a price: the price of his Life. "You have been purchased at a price," St. Paul writes, "therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:20), or again, the First Letter of Peter tells us that our redemption was purchased not with things like silver or gold but "with the precious blood of Christ,

as of a spotless, unblemished lamb” (1 Peter 1:19).

#### **IV. 153 Fish**

The Gospel of today’s Mass, like yesterday’s, again brings home the point that the Risen Christ is not a phantasm or a specter. No, he eats with his disciples on the seashore, sharing with them some fish, cooked over a charcoal fire. The Lord’s Risen Life is utterly new yet connected with our lives, including our bodily existence.

And this is just after Peter hauls ashore his net filled with 153 large fish. And what, we might ask, is the significance of the number 153? St. John the Evangelist certainly had an eye for detail and witnessing the Risen Lord’s astonishing appearance on the seashore he may well have remembered this detail, just as we tend to remember details of days when something important happens in our lives.

Yet, there may well be a deeper symbolism in the number 153. Saint Jerome, writing in the 5th century, commented that, at the time the Gospels were written, it was thought that 153 was the total number of all the species of fish in the world. So in this number we see that the disciples are called to gather all the nations of the world into the one Church of Christ. The same Risen Lord whom we encounter and receive in today’s Mass calls us to engage in the Church’s mission of evangelization . . . as individuals, as married couples, and as members of the family of the Knights of Columbus, from its early days truly international in character.

#### **V. Conclusion**

As the Paschal Octave continues to unfold, may the Risen Christ bless these meetings of our Board; and may He bless each of you, and your families, with that fire and light from Heaven which alone dispels the darkness of sin and death.

Vivat Jesus!