

040410 Easter Sunday

On behalf of Fr. Bill, the deacons, the parish staff -- I'd like to extend this wish for a blessed and happy Easter to all. Thanks to the Fr. Bill for his dedicated work bringing us through Lent and the Triduum and to Easter. Special thanks to the ladies who decorated the Church -- and thanks to the Choral Society for the music at the Easter Vigil and this morning.

Thank you parishioners and visitors for coming together as community - a community of believers. No Christian who willingly stays home truly understands what it means to be a practicing Christian. And if you are a Catholic who hasn't been coming to Church -- we welcome you to this liturgy. The Church isn't the same without you -- please keep coming and practice the whole of our Catholic faith.

Everything we hold dear in our Faith is based on the Resurrection. As St. Paul said: "If Christ be not risen from the dead, we are still in our sins". Few skeptics would dispute the evident fact that the disciples of Jesus fell apart as cowards when Christ was arrested. Men do not readily confess to cowardice, and the Bible story that the disciples twice fell asleep when they should have been keeping watch, and "all forsook him and fled" when Jesus was arrested, these are not the sort of things which Evangelists would be expected to invent or tell about themselves.

Seven weeks after Easter we find these timid, broken men risking imprisonment and death in the name of the one whom they had forsaken in despair. How can we explain this psychological revolution?

There is only one explanation that fits the facts – the explanation given by St. Peter: "This Jesus -- God has raised up; of this we are all witnesses." This Resurrection has always been regarded by the Catholic Church as the greatest of the miracles of our Divine Lord. It may interest you to know that the only feast and celebration in the earliest Church was the Resurrection. It proves more clearly than any other miracle the Divinity of our Lord, and, therefore, it confirms every other miracle. It confirms His teachings, puts the prophecies of our Lord beyond dispute, and establishes beyond all possibility of doubt His Divinity and the divinity of His mission.

The Resurrection of our Lord from the dead is the foundation of our Faith; it is the source, too, of all Christian morals, because it proves the future resurrection of men from the dead; it therefore establishes the truth, that there is a future existence.

Now, it is this future existence that makes life and the duties of life so solemn and important for us. I talked about this on Good Friday: our existence in eternity shall be happy or miserable, according as our lives upon earth are holy or unholy. Take away life after death and you take from men all responsibility, you destroy the very notion of virtue. You give the vicious unlimited power to work evil; you take from the virtuous all their consolation and all their hope.

If, as St. Paul says, we do not rise again, if our hopes are to be confined to this world, then, indeed, we are the most wretched of men. For whatever we do is of no avail. Prayer is profitless, for there is nothing to pray for. To what purpose do we watch, and fast, and mortify ourselves, if there were no reward, no risen God to welcome us as His disciples.

What reason is there to bear our crosses faithfully for Him? Therefore, it is in our final Resurrection that all our hopes are laid, and the Resurrection of our Lord on this great solemn feast of Easter is the pledge of the Resurrection, and the future life of every soul that He saved. As St. John Chrysostom aptly stated, "In every business or action, the hope of a future result is the motive which actuates us; for he who plows, does so that he may reap; and he who fights, that he may conquer. Take from man the hope of resurrection, and there is no longer piety or virtue."

And now -- we've completed the forty days journey through a Lenten desert. The large stone has been rolled back and we are alive with Christ. We are called to start a pilgrimage as to Emmaus. We begin a pilgrimage to go and share the good news.

I've often talked about Catherine Doherty of Madonna House. For dozens of years she used to come to visit Winslow 90 miles north of here. Now she is being considered by the Church for sainthood. She wrote many books and articles. Some tell of Russians who set out on pilgrimage.

These pilgrims leave home with no money... and only one day's food and drink. A destination can be hundreds of miles away. The pilgrims bring Christ with them. And often, these pilgrims experience Christ in the homes they are invited to stay in. So we need not worry how well we are equipped or how much knowledge we have. Pray... ask Christ to send His Spirit to guide you.... and stay within the practices of the 2,000 year old Catholic Church.

When we face the meaning of Easter we are at the crossroads of life and belief. Eventually we must choose one way or the other. Am I a casual tourist with rose colored sunglasses sort of meandering through Christ-is-alive stuff? Or am I a real pilgrim for Christ? What do I believe? No matter what my parents or my friends believe. It is a question I can only answer for myself. Have I come here today because I really believe in the resurrected and glorified person of Jesus? Is he real to me? Do I have a relationship with him? Does Easter express reality? Do I believe that death is not a period - it is a comma in our existence?

Father Lou Guntzelman is a priest of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. He says that in the early years of the Christian era, some were asked whether they thought their own resurrection was outlandish and foolish. The reply from those early days was, "Which is a greater miracle for God to do? Create me from absolutely nothing, or once he has created me, to complete and keep me alive forever? Creation from nothingness is a greater miracle than continuation!" It's been said, **"To the person who dies, the great day of death does not merely arrive, like a date on a calendar: it explodes like an event which Faith has been keeping for us as an awesome surprise."**

I don't know about you -- but in the words of the popular Christian song of recent years... I can only imagine.

Can I get an Amen on that?