

AN EASTER HOMILY

12 April 2020

My Sisters and Brothers In Christ, let me begin by wishing you all a Blessed and Joyful Easter! Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Christ is Alive! In spite of our current circumstances, we are celebrating today Our Lord's Resurrection.

A few days ago, a lady said to me, "Bishop we are not going to have Easter this year." My response to her was, "Oh yes, we will celebrate Easter in spite of all that we are experiencing." No doubt this lady had in mind the fact that we will not have packed churches on Easter Day, neither will we have Easter fairs and beach picnics. As exciting as these may be, Easter is more than these things. Easter is a celebration of our Lord's victory over all that seeks to destroy God's creation – sin, disease, death, division, despair, and decay. Given our present conditions, and faced with the destruction and death caused by the COVID -19 pandemic, some may be tempted to doubt and give up hope. To such persons, I entreat you to still trust God who is still in control. He always has the final word.

COVID – 19 is a breath-stealing virus. Every day, it claims hundreds of lives around the world. I am sure we have all heard the grim accounts by persons who have experienced the virus – the excruciating pains and the fight to stay alive. Many have died and are dying without loved ones at their side. My heart goes out to those who mourn their tragic loss. We Christians believe that death is only a passing from one life to another. Holy Scripture assures us that those who die in Christ will live with him. To the many persons who are fighting the disease, and to those personnel on the front-lines, I say, "Be strong, be courageous, keep trusting in God as we uphold you in our prayers."

With no cure in sight, many of us are filled with fear. We feel helpless. In our attempt to stop this awful virus, we are locked in, covering our noses and mouths with cloths, or masks of different materials, washing our hands, and observing social distancing wherever we go. As someone has recently warned, in the midst of this pandemic, we must be careful not to become socially distant.

The “shut down” in so many areas of life conjures up the feeling of being locked up in a dark tomb. I admire the creative spirit which has manifested itself during this pandemic. One of the many online messages I have received depicts Jesus peeping out of the tomb, with a mask hanging from his ear, and the Roman soldier keeping watch saying to him, “You had better stay inside. The corona virus is out here!” Well, we know that no virus, nothing in all creation could prevent God from raising Jesus from that dark tomb. Jesus had spent three days in darkness. Then God gave him a new, restored and resurrected life.

Have you taken note? Reports are showing that while people are on ‘lockdown’, the environment is being restored. Skies once covered with smog and dust are becoming brighter and clearer, the air and the rivers are looking and smelling fresher. Nature is being cleansed. We are, therefore, forced to reflect and think seriously on aligning our lives with God’s will for his creation.

In the gospel according to John, we read a detailed account of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was still dark. She went with expectation after the third day; while all were still without hope; while the spectre of death still shrouded the land and her heart. And in the darkness, just before sunrise, she found the stone rolled away, and the grave opened.

Then Mary ran to two other disciples and told them to go and see for themselves. The first thing they saw was the linen cloths which covered Jesus’ broken body. They were lying there. The face cloth was not with the other linen cloths but was folded up in its own place. And even though the disciples still did not really understand the idea of resurrection from the scriptures, they saw and trusted what they had seen. The cloths attested to what had happened.

Several of the Old Testament prophets had spoken about the idea of resuscitation and resurrection. Among them were Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Ezekiel, in chapter 37: 5 states, “Then He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy Son of Man, and say to it, This is what the sovereign Lord says: “Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath entered them, and they came

to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude". Again in verses 9 and 10, Ezekiel reports, "The Lord says, 'I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live.'" Then Hosea states in Chapter 6 verse 2, "After two days, he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him." Israel would be resuscitated!

Isaiah says, "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning the earth will give birth to her dead. Go my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you, hide yourselves for a little while (Isaiah 26: 19-20). Here was an oracle of Divine restoration. What the prophets of old foresaw in the restoration of Israel, Mary Magdalene encountered in the appearance of the Risen Christ in her experience of the Empty Tomb.

Mary stayed behind while the two disciples went away. When she looked into the tomb, she saw two angels standing where Jesus had been. When she turned around, she saw Jesus - His body full of life. In that moment, she knew that everything would change. All her hopes, affirmed. All her fears relieved.

Brothers and sisters, as we celebrate on this Easter Day, the Resurrection means so much more to us than it ever did. We have been living in darkness, confined to our homes, to a tomb-like existence. Life is not the same. Many of us do not go to work. Several of us are out of work. We do not go out to play. We cover our faces; we guard our living. We are frightened; we take all kinds of precautions to stave off that invisible 'breath-stealing' virus that threatens and keeps us locked away. We take action so that the cold hand of death might pass us by. This will last only for a time. For this too shall pass. By God's enlivening Grace, we must learn day by day to keep Hope alive.

We are in the waiting mode. This is a time of waiting, a time of expectation. We know that no matter what, this enemy has no power over us. God will raise us up. A new day is coming. That day is fast approaching.

Mary's faith kept her expectant and waiting, watching for something new, waiting for something to change, something miraculous to happen. She was not sure

when or how; but on the third day in the darkness, hoping that God would come through; that light would somehow break through. Initially, Mary thought that the authorities had taken Jesus' body and discarded it. Jesus had to appear to His followers several times before they were shaken into knowing and understanding and believing that God had indeed raised him from the dead. It did not happen all at once. And that is where we find ourselves today - sceptical; uncertain. Do we risk going out among people again?

When Mary and the disciples realized what had happened; that life had been restored; that God's promise had been fulfilled; that resurrection was here; they gained the courage to open the doors and walk out into the light. Life had changed. Never again would Jesus be restricted by time and space. A new life and a new time had dawned, and with it a new kind of spirit and a new kind of people.

We are Easter people – resurrection people. Resurrection people are people of indomitable hope. St. Paul reminds us that Hope does not disappoint. The watch-and-wait people of God. Be expectant. A new day is coming. When it comes, our face cloths, our masks will be removed and we will breathe freely once more. We will once more move freely, knowing and renewing the joy of family and friends. We will get together, sing together, worship together in our church buildings and fellowship together. That is Resurrection!

Life in the future will never be the same. The experiences of death and darkness all around will change us. We will come forth renewed and restored. We will view life from a different perspective. We will become more appreciative of life and all that is in it. No longer will we take life for granted. We will become who we are already, Resurrection People! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Fear not! Resurrection is coming. Watch ... Wait ... Listen for the breath, the Spirit of God! We celebrate the Lord who gives life and restores life, today and always. The Lord Is Risen Indeed!! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! AMEN and AMEN!