

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
EASTER VIGIL, APRIL 15, 2017
THE BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC

My dear friends in Christ, this evening we celebrate the greatest feast of victory in history. We celebrate the ultimate conquest of evil, the triumph of love, the reason for hope, and the definitive statement that God does not leave us in darkness and fear. He is faithful. He rescues us from the clutches of death.

To all present in this National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and to those who are spiritually united with us through the Eternal Word Television Network, especially those who are homebound or alone, may the peace of the Risen Lord be with you! As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative to the United States, I wish to express his spiritual closeness and his affection for you as precious members of the flock. This is my first Easter in this country; it is an honor to celebrate the great Victory of Christ with you!

Our Gospel, which narrates this Victory, tells us that the women made their way to the tomb only to find it empty. An angel appeared, telling them *Do not be afraid!* He ordered them to tell the disciples that *He has been raised from the dead and is indeed going ahead of you to Galilee.* In faith and in obedience, they go immediately. On their way, the Risen Lord appears to them and again tells them: *Do not fear; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.* It may seem redundant that both the angel of the Lord and the Lord Himself would have the same message: Do not be afraid! Tell them to go to Galilee.

Perhaps, the Lord knew that this was what was on the hearts of the disciples. They were afraid. Their hopes and dreams had been crushed. The One in whom they had placed their trust – for whom they had left everything – had been Crucified. They were afraid, even ashamed, because they had fled in fear. But now this! He has Risen!

Perfect love casts out all fear. The perfect love of Jesus on the Cross was for the forgiveness of our sins and for reconciliation between God and man. The perfect love of Jesus was seen in his self-offering to His Father for us. The perfect love of the Father for His Son is seen in His Glorious Resurrection. In the Resurrection, we see the triumph of love – that radiant light – that banishes the darkness of fear.

These days many are living in darkness and fear. I think firstly of those Christians in the Holy Land and the Christian East, as well as non-Christians, who are suffering persecution and tremendous violence, especially those in Syria and Iraq. How many refugees and migrants live in fear, having been forced to leave their homes and families due to war, persecution and poverty! How many search for a future, only to be met with rejection and suspicion! There are those living in loneliness and isolation, afraid to love or afraid to allow themselves to be loved. Many are afraid of what they have done or what they have failed to do – their sins. They are not unlike the Israelites who cried out to the Lord from the darkness of slavery in Egypt or again when Pharaoh and his chariots pursued them. The Lord heard their cries and rescued them.

This evening the Lord wants us to hear: *Do not be afraid.* He is Risen. He is close to you – just as He was close to the women and His disciples. The Scriptures tell us that after the angel appeared to them, the women went away from the tomb *fearful yet overjoyed.* This evening, let us have a reverential fear of the Lord, but rejoice that He is Risen!

The angel and the Lord asked the women to tell the Apostles to return to Galilee. Galilee was the place where they first heard the call. He is calling them back to him, so that they may

now read their experiences, their own journey of faith, their own response to the call -with all its successes and failures- in light of His Cross and Resurrection. This too is His call to us – to begin again from His act of love.

There is a newness brought by the Risen Lord and by the mercy He offers us. As Pope Francis said several years ago:

For each of us, too, there is a Galilee at the origin of our journey with Jesus. “To go to Galilee” ... means rediscovering our baptism as a living fountainhead, drawing new energy from the sources of our faith and our Christian experience. To return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light with which God’s grace touched me at the start of the journey. (HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS, EASTER VIGIL, 19 APRIL 2014)

What is that moment for you – when you first heard His call: *Follow me*? Most of us were baptized as infants, but surely there must be another moment – our own personal Galilee – when we encountered the Lord. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER DEUS CARITAS EST, 1)

It is time for each person to return to our own Galilee to meet the Risen Lord who gives our life a decisive direction – who helps us to live our dreams without fear in light of His Paschal Mystery. Renewed in the glow of His Victory, as missionary disciples, let us follow the example of the holy women and call our brothers and sisters back to Galilee, so that with them, we may rejoice once more to meet the Risen Lord!