

**HOMILY BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
EASTER SUNDAY  
CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER  
BETHESDA, MARYLAND  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy Easter! I am delighted to be with you again, and to share with your entire parish family the spiritual closeness of the Holy Father as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Thank you, Monsignor Vaghi, for your kind invitation.

Now that it is Easter, many of you will celebrate by enjoying delicious food, including sweet breads: doughnuts, cakes, and pastries – and best of all: *croissants!* (My condolences to those who are gluten-intolerant or who have to observe a “low-carb” diet!) We can enjoy breads like these because of that small and hidden ingredient, *yeast*, which causes the bread to rise, making it light and soft.

In today’s second reading, Saint Paul says: “Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?” In this case, Paul uses the image of yeast to describe, not something good, but rather the corrupting influence of a person in the community who was living in grave sin. Paul’s point is that even one person’s bad will, if not disciplined, could affect the whole local Church in a way that would damage the joy of the Gospel. And so he says: “Clear out the old yeast,” and “let us celebrate the feast [of the Resurrection], not with the old yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

These characteristics – sincerity and truth – must sustain and nourish our Christian lives, just as bread nourishes our bodies. And so, let us focus on what it means to live our lives in the spirit of truth.

On Good Friday, when Jesus told Pontius Pilate that he had come into the world to testify to the truth, the Roman governor asked cynically: “What is truth?” But as disciples of the one who said “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”, we know better than Pilate. We know that truth matters, because it leads us to freedom. And the first truth we are called to acknowledge is the truth about our own lives. For every person, there is a truth that *convicts* us, and a truth that *saves* us. What convicts us is the fact that “all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God”. But for those who acknowledge their sin and repent – as we have been led to do during this Lenten season – we are met with a far greater truth: Jesus, the face of the Father’s mercy, looks on us with love and restores us to new life.

In today’s Gospel passage, we see Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and the apostle John encountering the mystery of the Lord’s Resurrection. Let us see how each of these three disciples passed from the truth that convicted them, to the truth that saved them.

First, Mary Magdalene. The Gospels of Mark and Luke both reveal a fact about Mary's history. Before meeting Jesus, she had been possessed by seven demons. (*Imagine!*) We know nothing of the circumstances that led the Magdalene to suffer such a great affliction. But her bondage to those spirits, who could have no communion with God, presented a grave danger to Mary's own spiritual destiny. As unpleasant as it was, demonic possession was a truth of Mary Magdalene's life.

But then she met him who is truth itself. The *redeeming* truth of Mary's story is that Jesus chose her in love and set her free from spiritual affliction. From the moment that Jesus delivered her, she was captured by his love, and she remained one of his most devoted followers: present at the cross, the first to receive his resurrected appearance, and the one sent to be "the apostle to the Apostles".

Next to be named in this Gospel passage is Simon Peter. We do not need to look far in the pages of the Gospels to learn some truths about Peter that are quite convicting. He rebuked Jesus for saying that he must suffer and die. He fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane during the Lord's agony. Worst of all, in accord with Jesus' prediction, he denied three times even knowing him. This is all part of the truth of Peter's story. And the fact that we read about these failures in the New Testament proves that Peter, and the other Apostles, acknowledged these embarrassing facts about their lives.

Peter was able to confess the truth about himself because of the *greater* truth by which he had been redeemed. Peter's redeeming truth is that Jesus looked at him, not with condemnation, but with compassion, precisely at the moment of Peter's deepest failure. Furthermore, Peter *accepted* the Master's compassion, wept bitterly for his denial, and when Christ was raised he re-committed himself to loving the Lord and laying down his life for the sheep.

The third person mentioned in today's Gospel is "the other disciple": John the Apostle. We commend John for being the only one of the Twelve who was present at the Lord's cross on Good Friday. Yet his story is not exempt from its own unpleasant truths. Together with his brother James, John asked Jesus for seats next to him when he came into his glory. In asking for this, John demonstrated a kind of "careerism", which Pope Francis frequently warns us against, especially when talking with the clergy. John saw his closeness to Jesus as a way to gain a position for himself, rather than a means to offer his life in service.

John's redeeming truth is that, by remaining close to the Master's heart, his love is purified. When he is running to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, we can see that he has begun to set his hope on Jesus more than his own glory. His Gospel becomes a testament to the glory of Christ, and he witnesses to that glory to the end. He is the last Apostle left on earth before being entering the glory of heaven.

What we learn from these three disciples, we can apply to our own Christian lives. When we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus with the "unleavened bread" of sincerity and truth, we must acknowledge both truths: the truth of our sin and weakness, and the truth of Jesus' forgiveness and love. As Peter proclaimed, on the basis of his own experience: "everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Having listened to the word of God, which announces the Resurrection of Christ, we now turn toward the liturgy of the Eucharist. The unleavened bread, which will become the Body of Christ, is a reminder of our call as Christians: may we be free from the “old yeast” of malice and wickedness, and always live with a heart full of sincerity and truth.