

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS OF THE EASTER VIGIL
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, D.C. – MARCH 30, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen!

Allow me to convey to all of you the warm greetings and spiritual closeness of the Holy Father, on this most triumphant night of our Lord’s victory over death.

“Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.”¹ These are the words that Moses and God’s people sang after they had crossed the Red Sea and saw that their pursuers had perished. We also sing these words in celebration of the thousands of people who, tonight in churches across the world, will emerge from the waters of Baptism as victors with Christ over sin and death. Just as the Israelites had been freed from slavery by an act of God, so the baptized are freed from enslavement to sin and death. **“Let us sing to the Lord!”**

This is indeed a night for singing. Thank God that in this Basilica we have a choir of such beautiful voices who can lead us in songs that give fitting worship to the risen Lord. How good it is to hear once more, after a six-week “fast”, the sound of “Alleluia!” How good it will be, in the days and weeks to come, to “feast” on that word of praise, *Alleluia*, that tries to express a joy that is inexpressible. ***Joy*** is the theme of this holy night. The glory of Jesus, which was mostly hidden throughout his life, and was gradually unveiled through signs, is now fully revealed by an act more stupendous than anything that anyone has ever known. By his own power, he has risen from the dead, thus vindicating his prophecy that he would raise “this temple” on the third day,² and proving that he possesses mastery over life and death.

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¹ *Exodus* 15:1b.

² Cf. *John* 2:19.

But Jesus achieves this mastery for more than just himself. **His resurrection is meant to bring about a radical change in our own lives. A change from focusing on the “dead” things of this world which Jesus has overcome, to following him, the Man who is always alive among us and leading his Church in an ongoing mission of salvation.**

This is the change that we see the holy women in tonight’s Gospel being confronted with. Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome are on their way to the tomb of Jesus. If we were to join them on the way, knowing what we know, we might, with some playful amusement, ask them: “Does the body of a resurrected man need to be anointed?... Must the stone be rolled back from the tomb of one who has already escaped from death?”

Make no mistake: these holy women were among the most devoted followers of Jesus. Their courage and loyalty proved stronger than that of the Apostles at the time of the Lord’s Passion. And yet, even they had not understood the Lord’s words about “rising from the dead”.³ They needed to have the *experience* of the risen Christ in order to believe. And so, the young man in the white robe says to them: “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’”⁴

In a sense, the one whom the women seek is different from the one they *should* be seeking. They seek “Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified.” But to seek the body of “the crucified” is to seek a past event. It is to visit what *was*. In the meantime, they are missing out on what *is*! Upon finding an empty tomb, they are “stopped in their tracks”, as it were. That is why the young man must tell them, “Do not be amazed!” In other words: *Do not remain so shocked at this empty tomb, that you are prevented from going and finding Him who has emptied it! Go! He is already ahead of you. Go and catch up with Jesus!* This is when their lives are changed. Instead of reverencing a deceased rabbi, they will now be following the living Lord.

³ Cf. *Mark* 9:9-10.

⁴ *Mark* 16:6-7.

The experience of these holy women is a good lesson for us. Like them, sometimes we are “stopped in our tracks” at something we did not expect: a “new thing” that God has done – in our own spiritual life, or in the life of the Church. Something we did not expect which leaves us “amazed”, and perhaps even a bit afraid. When this happens, we can respond in one of two ways. One response would be to remain “stuck” where we are, unable or unwilling to apprehend the new reality. This would be like the women if they had remained at the tomb and grieved that it was empty! This is what we do if we mourn for the loss of a version of Christ or an idea of his Church that we have fashioned for ourselves. It is time, instead, to stop being “amazed” and to go, immerse ourselves in the company of the Lord’s disciples, seeing Jesus where he truly is: leading his people in an ongoing mission of love.

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My dear brothers and sisters, the joy that marks Easter is more than an optimistic sentiment. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that confirms our deepest hope: Christ has fulfilled his promise, and he is continuing to fulfill his promise. He has risen from dead, and he is still alive and well in the midst of his Church! While the new kind of life to which he calls us exceeds our expectations, it is a life worth living because he will always lead us into greater joy.