

+ EASTER SUNDAY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
April 1, 2018

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very dear sons,

On Easter morning, the first day of the week according to the way of counting in Israel, following the terrible drama of the Lord's most sorrowful Passion, including the abandonment He suffered on the part of His Apostles and Disciples – they had fled the mortal danger that threatened them as well; after those hours, heavy with sadness, during which the Body of Christ remained in the Tomb under armed guard, while Saint Peter and the others cowered in fear within their homes; during all of this the world was in dire need of some good news. Few, indeed, were those who realized that the Savior Himself, the Messiah Promised to the people of God, had really come into the world, being born of the Blessed Virgin of Nazareth, Mary. Even fewer now held onto some sort of hope that the great works of Jesus of Nazareth would turn out—after all—not to have been a mere wishful-thinking. For all intents and purposes, the entire world still labored, early this Easter morning, under the shadow of death – it had been that way for thousands of years – and the human race had well nigh come to the end of its spiritual rope. Therefore the announcement of an authentic joy, a light to dispel the darkness, was sorely wanting, was desperately needed, even though few were able clearly to formulate such a hope.

But now, as the first rays of sunlight appeared to the holy women en route for the Tomb, the real import of the Good News announced to men by Jesus of Nazareth, its incalculable consequences and supernatural nature, began very gradually – slowly but surely – to dawn upon a sleeping world. Even in our own day, as we stand slightly beyond the threshold of the 21st century of the Christian era, mankind has still not fully realized what happened when the God-Man emerged dazzling with light and life from the Tomb; but we Christians have come to believe in and hold onto the greatest of Good News.

The Greek Philosopher Plato once proposed an allegory about a cave. It was a cave very different from that of Jesus' burial, but a cave not without some resemblance to the place of the rising of Christ. In the cave imagined by Plato, men are chained so that they can only see the back wall. Behind these prisoners, towards the entrance, a fire projects the silhouettes of various objects onto the back side of the cave as the prisoners watch. In this way they only see various shadows, which they take for the one reality. But now, says Plato, if one of the prisoners is set free, he first sees the fire and the objects casting shadows, thus understanding the true circumstances of this cave; then, though he may not like it at first, if he is dragged out of the cave into the open countryside, once his eyes adjust to the stronger light, he is able to see the whole outside world in its splendor and beauty. He now sees the real world and is thoroughly delighted. The meaning of this allegory is that the true philosopher, the man leaving the cave, escapes the shadows of mere opinions and enters into the light of intelligible ideas and of Truth.

The Apostles and the Holy Women on Easter morning are something like that man who is brought out of a cave into the light of day. After the sad events that ended in the cave near Golgotha where the seeming failure of Jesus was brought to conclusion, they now enter into the light of the

revelation of the Resurrection, something vastly brighter even than physical sunshine or great ideas of the philosophers. At first these followers of the Lord are blinded by the light, troubled in their souls, as we can see by the narrative of all four Gospels. Such fright! Such footraces to and fro! The tears of Saint Mary Magdalen! And yet, deep in their hearts, the light grows and the joy of the Resurrection dawns upon them gradually. This then is the Good News, the greatest event of the history of the world, something immense. This is Easter.

But there is another aspect of the mystery and of that moment which we might consider. When Plato's philosopher, the one who had gone out into the light of day, escaping the cave where he had been imprisoned, decides to go back into the cave in order to persuade the others still chained inside of the Truth he has experienced, he is met with a most difficult problem. On the one hand, his eyes having become accustomed to the light of day, he has difficulty in seeing his way inside the darkness. He stumbles around. To those still dwelling within, he appears as one who has *lost* his vision and not as someone who has gained new light. Also, when he tries to convince his former fellows of the reality of the outside world he has contemplated, they deny his sayings most adamantly and want nothing to do with this unwelcome news, because it simply does not fit with their own conception of things.

In a similar manner, the Apostles, Disciples and Holy Women and all those who became witnesses of the Resurrection seemed to their fellow Jews and others to have become quite mad. Their testimony was strongly rejected by the greater number of their contemporaries. It was necessary that they sacrifice themselves, like the Lord—often losing their very lives—, in order to bring the light of the Resurrection to a world chained in darkness. This is still our challenge today, when so many are groping in shadows, though the modality of this announcement has changed somewhat. This news is a matter of life and death. But despite the difficulty, the substantial joy of the Resurrection, in the end, is a powerful force that cannot be stopped. The Holy Father spoke of this in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.¹

So, let us leave behind the shadows of all-too-human opinions and the darkness of this thing Christ and His followers call "the world." Not the world of souls to be saved. Not the world of God's glorious creation, but the world of minds and hearts darkened by sin. Let us come into the light of the Lord's Easter triumph, imitating the Blessed Virgin Mary, the rejoicing Queen of Heaven, who was surely the first to understand the truly Good News of her Son's victory over death and evil. Some day the rest of the world will also recognize this Good News, and the elect will sing eternally the Alleluia that chases away death and sorrow. Amen. Alleluia.

¹ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of 24 Nov 2013, n. 276.