

+ easter sunday

April 17, 2022

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

At that time: Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Salome...entering into the sepulcher saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed with a white robe...who saith to them: Be not afraid; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he is risen, he is not here...

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

Ever since a certain Easter morning, when the unthinkable, the unspeakable, the unimaginable victory of life over death and of light over darkness occurred, Christians have looked to the place from which the Risen Christ escaped in radiant glory, as a symbol and proof of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Although we all too often forget the lesson of God's wisdom and power, falling back on human remedies for our woes; nevertheless, in times of greatest need, the Church perennially returns to that unalterable source of supernatural life that has kept her alive for so many centuries—in defiance of the efforts of hell to wipe her off the face of the earth—I mean the grace of the Risen Christ and the overwhelming fact of the *Empty Tomb*.

This expression 'He has risen,' explains Pope Francis, goes beyond human capacity. Even the women who had gone to the tomb and had found it open and empty could not confirm [at the moment] 'He has risen,' but they could only say that the tomb was empty.¹

Now, in our own times the battleground where a religious and cultural warfare has been waged with particular intensity is—quite paradoxically—the maternal womb. Who could calculate the grief that weighs upon our Western societies owing to the abortion holocaust, which is to say the cold and calculated elimination of so many 'Holy Innocents'? The very place that was meant to be the matrix of all human life has all too often become a barren place, an underworld region where contraceptive poisons flow like the accursed waters of the River Styx, on the frontier between Earth and Hell. In such a social context, few think seriously about the future; few have the courage to bring children into this world through a conscious and loving decision. The place that should be the living cradle of life has become the *Empty Womb*.

Far be it from us, however unwittingly, to give glory to the forces of darkness by letting ourselves despair at the progress of the anti-life culture or because of any attack on our faith. Easter is the eternal death-blow to all that rebels against God, to all that denies life. At the earth-shaking moment of the Resurrection, or more precisely at the moment when the Angel of God rolled back the stone to reveal the empty sepulcher, the Roman guards were stricken with panic like mice: '*see how they run...*'. Are these fearful soldiers not an eloquent symbol of the cowardly politicians—often nominally Catholic—who crawl before public opinion, excusing their lack of backbone under the pretext of "not wanting to impose his opinions on others"?

¹ Angelus, April 5, 2021.

Easter at the monastery is an all-engrossing affair: let the upheavals of society wait outside the walls. Through the contemplative power of the Holy Liturgy we are led, not only to remember the Gospel event of the Resurrection of the Lord, but to enter into the mystery itself. The limits of time and space dissolve for a moment, and we join the Apostles and the holy women in the discovery of the paschal faith. Everything else must take second place. If we ever want to win the battle for the soul of America—and of the entire modern world—the place to start is in prayer, and not just any prayer...

Of course, the definitive victory will only occur at the end of time when Christ the King returns to judge the living and the dead. In the mean time, we all have a prophetic role to play in bearing witness to the Easter light, each of us in his or her little corner of the world. Although the fetid waves of secularism may continue to engulf and nearly drown the Church for a time, nothing is more predictable than the re-emergence of the bark of Peter once the storm has passed. Truly the Church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Truly the Empty Tomb stands as a sign of hope and of an eternal springtime for us as for the generations of believers that have gone before.

The Christian faith, explained Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI some years ago, stands or falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead. If this were taken away, it would still be possible to piece together from the Christian tradition a series of interesting ideas about God and men, about man's being and his obligations, a kind of religious world view; but the Christian faith itself would be dead. Jesus would be a failed leader, who despite his failure remains great and can cause us to reflect. But he would then remain purely human, and his authority would extend only so far as his message is of interest to us. He would no longer be a criterion; the only criterion left would be our own judgment...In other words we would be alone... Only if Jesus is risen has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. (*Jesus of Nazareth, Holy Week*, pg. 202)

A great number of our contemporaries remain skeptical. They simply are not ready to accept the evidence of the Empty Tomb, to enter into the faith of the Resurrection. They readily accept the idea that Jesus *is* a failed leader, that the truth is that the Christian faith is dead, that we truly are alone in a cold universe doomed to disintegrate over time. No rational argument seems to touch them. Perhaps we should, like Saint John Henry Newman (*A Grammar of Assent*), admit that rational discourse will not convince modern man and that unless a man's heart is predisposed to believe, all is in vain. So let us put it all in pragmatic terms.

The culture of death does not work. The practical atheist claims that Christianity must fail, but his own culture that now dominates has already—practically—failed. Societies that once thrived under the auspices of faith in the Empty Tomb are dying of sterility under the accursed sign of the Empty Womb. The Light is going out in the land of the atheist's Creed!

But let us be assured. As the soldiers at the Tomb can bear witness, the power of the Risen Lord is sovereign. Nothing can stop this sacred might that shakes the earth. In His Light we shall see the Light. Easter morning is already the beginning of eternity; the Empty Tomb is the promise of the renewal of all things.

The Lord is truly risen, Alleluia, Alleluia. And hath appeared to Simon, Alleluia. Queen of Heaven, rejoice!

