

Easter- 2018

Egyptian pyramids are world-famous as one of the “seven Wonders” of the world. But they are actually gigantic tombs containing the mummified bodies of Egyptian Pharaohs. Westminster Abby is famous and thousands visit it because the dead bodies of famous writers, philosophers and politicians are entombed there. But there is a Shrine of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and pilgrims from all over the world visit a tomb there which is empty with a note at its entrance which says, “*He is not here.*” It is famous because Jesus Christ who was once buried there rose from the dead, leaving an empty tomb as he had told his disciples he would. Thus, he worked the most important miracle in his life, defying the laws of nature and proving that he is God. We rejoice at this great and unique event by celebrating Easter.

Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Church for three reasons.

1) The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the greatest of the miracles – it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: “*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your faith is in vain*” (I Cor 15: 14). “*Jesus is Lord, he is risen*” (Rom 10: 9) was the central theme of the *kerygma* (or 'preaching'), of the apostles because Jesus prophesied it as a sign of his divinity: “*Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again*” (Jn 2: 19). The founder of no other religion has an empty tomb as Jesus has. 2) Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: “*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies*” (Jn 11: 25-26). 3) Easter is a feast which gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows and tears. It reminds us that life is worth living. It is our belief in the real presence of the risen Jesus that

gives meaning to our personal as well as our communal prayer, strength to fight against temptations and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears.

Our lives are full of death, death in all shapes and sizes. Usually we are worried only about the ultimate death of the body. But we are not worried about the little deaths that we are faced more frequently. The deaths of the spirit and the soul which come with the bully in the schoolyard, from ethical sacrifices we make in our lives, from addictions of all kinds; addictions to work, to drugs, to alcohol, to pornography and to abortion. . We die when our whole lives start to be ruled by addictions. And we all have them, every one of us; we just may not call them by that name. We live in the midst of death. People of all ages are suffering from loneliness, family breakdown, and lack of full-time employment, financial difficulties, abuse, despair and stress. A growing number of them live and die without enjoying the peace and Happiness of Easter. It does not have to be like that. My question is this: How can this Easter really make a difference in their lives? And does Easter somehow make all that go away?

Life Messages: Easter is an invitation to lead a life of resurrection. Easter gives us the joyful message that we are a “resurrection people.” This means that we are not supposed to lie buried in the tomb of our sins, evil habits, dangerous addictions, despair, discouragement or doubts. Instead, we are expected to live a joyful and peaceful life, constantly experiencing the real presence of the resurrected Lord in all the events of our lives and amid the boredom, suffering, pain and tensions of our day-to-day life. For many in the United States, the joy of Easter means to return to the things we gave up for Lent. It's back to chocolate, sweets, soft drinks, ice cream, etc. Yes, we do have to "celebrate and rejoice" on Easter (Lk 15:32), and these treats help us to celebrate, but if we find our joy simply in returning to the old life we lived before Lent, we will have missed Easter.

This morning, I was talking to priest friend of mine working in Germany. He celebrated the Easter Vigil at an inner-city church about to be closed. It was the last Easter Vigil celebrated at this church. As he started the celebration he was surprised and shocked. Only five people were in the main body of the church. There were 5 people in the choir too. It broke his heart to see this parish in ruins — a parish which previously had two assistant pastors and a school taught by ten nuns. Nevertheless, he celebrated the Easter Vigil. He celebrated by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Although we looked and felt dead he was filled with the hope of the resurrection.

My dear friends, by renewing our baptismal promise, let us surrender our life to the Risen Christ. Whoever die with Christ will rise with him for eternal glory! Easter is a symbol of new life. Let this Easter be a new beginning for you. If you have been away from the church, let this Easter be a new beginning for you. If you have been away from your family, let this Easter be a new beginning for you. If you have been addicted to alcohol, drug and sex, or pornography, let this Easter be a new beginning for you. If you hear nothing else this morning remember this, people who encounter the risen Christ are never the same. We become a new person, a new creation in Christ Jesus. As the Scriptures say the old has gone and the new has come. Romans 6:4 And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Happy Easter!