

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EASTER SUNDAY
CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER, BETHESDA, MARYLAND
APRIL 17, 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, in communion with our Holy Father, I wish you a Happy and Peace-filled Easter! As the Apostolic Nuncio, I express the Holy Father's spiritual closeness to you and your loved ones as we celebrate the Victory of our Risen Lord! I thank your pastor, Monsignor Peter Vaghi, who has invited me again to celebrate this holiest of days with you at Little Flower Church. It is a joy to be with you as the Church exclaims: He is Risen!

"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad" was the refrain from our Responsorial Psalm. The overarching theme of this Easter day is joy. While God gives us every day of our life, for which we should never cease to thank Him, today is the most special day on which the Lord who created the world in the beginning remakes it. The recreated world is even more beautiful than the created one.

The Lord has made us for this day, to experience the recreation, the new life Easter brings. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus said, *"Behold I make all things new!"* Today Jesus not only renews all of creation through his overcoming of sin and the death and disorder introduced into the world by sin, but also desires to make us new.

Paul describes in the second reading (Colossians 3:1-4) how we enter into this dramatic transformation: *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*

The new and improved human life Jesus wishes to give us involves new and higher aspirations. It means a death to the old Adam in us and a resurrection to the New Adam, alive in us. It involves truly lifting up our hearts to the Lord. If we permit the Lord to remake us this day in His image and likeness, then we will experience the joy and gladness of this most sacred day.

Joy is meant to be our fundamental response to this day. Catholic Churches throughout the world exploded with joy last night in the singing of the *Exsultet*: *"Rejoice, let Mother Church rejoice, arrayed with the lightning of glory, let this holy building shake with joy, filled with the mighty voices of the peoples."*

In English Easter hymns, we burst with that gladness. In *The Strife is Over*, we sing, *"O let us swell the joyful strain."* In *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*, we exhort each other, *"Raise your joys and triumphs high."* In the great Marian antiphon sung each of the 50 days of the Easter season, the *Regina Caeli*, we chant, *"Be Joyful, Mary, Heavenly Queen!"*

The Preface of the Easter Mass summarizes this Easter attitude: *"Overcome with paschal joy, every land, every people exults in your praise"* and with all the angels and heavenly powers, we praise and thank God *"yet more gloriously"* on this day *"above all."*

Jesus came into the world, as He said at the Last Supper, so that “*my joy may be in you and your joy be complete!*” Today is the day on which He wants to give us that fullness. *This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad!*

If we are to celebrate Easter Sunday well, we must be joyful and glad. This has been one of the principal messages of Pope Francis. In his exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, the Pope lamented the fact that “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,” who live as if they always have “just come back from a funeral.” That is not the Christian way!

Christians are called to contagiously share the joy of the Gospel, born from an encounter with the Risen Christ. They are called to live that joy that filled the heart of Mary Magdalene when she realized that Christ was alive; that joy experienced by the Beloved Disciple who saw and believed; that joy felt by Simon Peter when the Risen Lord forgave him for his threefold denial; or the joy, manifested in the heart by the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Pope Francis writes: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (*EG*, 1). He instructs us that Christians need to be overcome with Paschal joy because the “heart of the Christian message will always be the same,” in humanly good times and in bad, in poverty and prosperity, in sickness and in health.

That message is about “the God who revealed His immense love in the crucified and risen Christ.” The fundamental Christian proclamation of the Gospel is: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (cf. *EG*, 164).

His love conquers death. The victory of Christ is His Resurrection, and we must celebrate this victory. St. Paul writes in the First Letter to the Corinthians: “*Now if Christ is not raised, in vain is our preaching and vain also is our faith*” (1 Cor 15:14). This is what we must announce: He is Risen! We are called to be witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ.

Everything depends on this. If we preach, if we speak, the essential reference point for belief is Christ, risen from the dead. If Christ did not rise, we are dead in our sins and our faith would be in vain, but Mary Magdalene and the Apostles, those who saw him, became witnesses. We are heirs to their testimony that Christ is alive.

Death came into the world through a man, but the resurrection and life came into the world through the New Man, Jesus Christ. The world was dominated by evil, but Christ has conquered evil. The Easter sequence says: “Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous; the prince of life who died, reigns immortal!” Only the hope that comes from the resurrection allows to face death; only through Christ’s resurrection is death conquered. This is the victory we celebrate.

The gift offered to believers by virtue of Christ’s resurrection is new life, sharing in the life of grace. This “new life” manifests itself – that is, life according to the spirit – in living as adopted sons and daughters, as brothers and sisters to each other. This new life means living, not as slaves to sin, but in the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. This is our joy: to be loved as sons and daughters, to know that we are loved – to understand and experience that there is a love stronger than death.

This love has a name, and His name is Jesus. This same Jesus who rose feeds us with His Body and Blood. He is the Paschal Lamb who was sacrificed for us. He is the pledge of our future resurrection, the promise of future glory that awaits us. The definitive victory over death, won by Christ, is shared with Him by humanity in the measure in which it receives the fruit of redemption.

The presence of the Risen Lord continues to be made manifest not only in the sacraments but in His Church – in each of you who radiate the joy of the Risen Lord. Therefore, go into the whole world and announce: Christ is Risen! He is truly Risen!