

EASTER HOMILY 2019

Most Reverend John O. Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

Sunday, April 21, 2019

Last night, at the end of the Easter Vigil, I greeted a family outside and was introduced to a brother and a sister from that family who were home from college.

The sister was home from Northeastern University in Boston. The brother was home from Northwestern University in Chicago! Northeastern in Boston. Northwestern in Chicago. I loved that!

I would ask just for a moment that all College students who are home visiting their families to please stand.

First of all, I want to welcome you all home!

Secondly, I want to thank you for your Catholic witness on the University and College Campuses of our great nation.

Your vibrant Catholic witness is so important and as your Bishop, Shepherd and Servant of your home Diocese of Rockville Centre, I want to thank you for that witness and to let you know how proud I am, along with your parents and families, of each one of you.

Please join me in thanking our College Students!

These days I am most in touch with Catholic college students from Stony Brook University, Hofstra University, Adelphi University and St. John's University.

The Holy Spirit is accomplishing great things in the Catholic Campus Ministries on the University campuses of Long Island!

In my prior dioceses, I invested a great deal of time with Catholic students at Lehigh University, Lafayette College, Muhlenberg College, Kutztown University, Alvernia University, the University of Delaware, and Salisbury State University. And I also make an occasional cameo appearance at my alma mater Princeton University and visit my niece Katherine at Holy Cross where she is a Junior.

It is an exciting and vibrant time of life where you are forging lifelong friendships, discerning educational paths, career paths and vocational paths. Thank you all on this Easter Sunday for putting the Risen Christ at the center of your college experience! God Bless You!

We celebrate this Easter Sunday just six days removed from the tragic fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

We pray in solidarity with Parisians and people around the world who treasure this beautiful expression in art and architecture of the Catholic faith and the Catholic soul.

We give profound thanks to our ecumenical and interfaith brothers and sisters and all people of good will who have expressed their compassion and solidarity.

Notre Dame has so much significance for the history of the Catholic Church and for the History of the World.

Perhaps the Paschal Mystery -- the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ -- we have been celebrating in this Sacred Triduum from the Mass of the Lord's Supper to Easter Sunday is encoded mysteriously in this historical tragedy.

Even hardened and dogmatic atheists recognize the greatness and creativity of humanity expressed in the art, the architecture and the soaring towers and spires of Notre Dame. They wept with everyone else in the streets of Paris and on every global news media and social media platform.

In fact, the New York Times Sunday Review Section this morning has an article by Christopher Caldwell entitled *The Nonbelievers Who Wept for Notre-Dame*. (NYT, April 21, 2019, 3)

And in yesterday's Wall Street Journal, Peggy Noonan wrote: "I had an intuition too as I watched Notre Dame burn. Somebody wonderful is watching at this moment and having a conversion experience. He will write of how the size of his grief, of his shock, opened a door in his head and heart and his faith came rushing in. We'll hear about that in coming years and maybe from more than one person." (WSJ, April 20, 2019, A15)

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the great Russian novelist (1821-1881), once said that he came to the Christian faith through the furnace of doubt.

We see Dostoevsky's own struggle between atheism and Christian faith in his fictional characters from the three Karamazov brothers and the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) to Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* (1869) and Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866).

Dostoevsky's insight is that there is a shadow atheist in every believer and there is a shadow believer in every atheist.

Paradoxically, some believers act as if God *does not* exist.

Some atheists act as if God *does* exist.

With the physical tragedy of the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral, perhaps a spiritual fire has been mysteriously lit in all of us wherever we are at in this moment of our lives.

Believers may embrace more fully the landscape of their Catholic faith instead of living like functional atheists.

Atheists may embrace that part of them that is a shadow believer and with Dostoevsky move from the furnace of doubt to the white hot existential joy of belief and the call to holiness.

In the Resurrected Light of this historical tragedy, we realize with the great theologian Romano Guardini that our Catholic Faith is never static.

It is either shrinking, eroding, fading away like the eroding gargoyles on the roof of Notre Dame gazing out at the sins of the City and the World and the self-destructive mirages of the seven deadly sins.

Or our Catholic faith is growing, expanding, engaging our hearts, our imaginations, our very souls with the historical truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the unique and only Redeemer of the World for all peoples, for all times, for all cultures and for all moments of history.

On this Easter Sunday morning we pray for the physical rebuilding of Notre Dame Cathedral and the rebuilding of the Catholic Church in Paris, in France, in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and everywhere around the world.

The French Catholic Historian Henri Daniel-Rops (1901-1965) once stated that historically just when it seems that the Catholic Faith is disappearing from France there is an explosive underground geyser of Catholic mission, spirit, history and mysticism ready to surge upward to the surface from the depths.

We also appeal for the intercession of the all the great saints of France. So many of these great saints worshipped at Notre Dame Cathedral.

So many of them experienced an expansion of their mystical and apostolic spirit as they contemplated the art, architecture and Catholic soul of Notre Dame.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad* (2018), Pope Francis reminds us: “Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy (32)...The Lord wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. (1)”

The power of the Risen Christ breaks through that temptation we all have to be bland and mediocre.

And in his recent Apostolic Exhortation to the Youth of the World entitled, *Christus Vivit* (2019), Pope Francis writes: “Becoming a saint means becoming

more fully yourself, becoming what the Lord wished to dream and create, and not a photocopy.” (162)

Our living encounter with the Risen Christ gives us the humble boldness to embrace our unique baptismal call to holiness, our unique ecclesial mission and our unique evangelizing adventure.

Thank you all for embracing that call. Thank you in a special way today to our young people for the courageous way you live your Catholic faith.

Finally, earlier today, Pope Francis gave his traditional Easter Morning *Urbi et Orbi* Address (his Address to the City of Rome and the World).

In this Address, he shares some of the global concerns of the Church that he asks all Catholics and people of good will to pray for. I would like to share with you a section of it and commend the Holy Father’s global intentions to all of us here today:

Christ is alive and he remains with us. Risen, he shows us the light of his face, and he does not abandon all those experiencing hardship, pain and sorrow. May he, the Living One, be hope for the beloved Syrian people, victims of an ongoing conflict to which we risk becoming ever more resigned and even indifferent. Now is instead the time for a renewed commitment for a political solution able to respond to people’s legitimate hopes for freedom, peace and justice, confront the humanitarian crisis and favour the secure re-entry of the homeless, along with all those who have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon and Jordan.

Easter makes us keep our eyes fixed on the Middle East, torn by continuing divisions and tensions. May the Christians of the region patiently persevere in their witness to the Risen Lord and to the victory of life over death. I think in particular of the people of Yemen, especially the children, exhausted by hunger and war. May the light of Easter illumine all government leaders and peoples in the Middle East, beginning with Israelis and Palestinians, and spur them to alleviate such great suffering and to pursue a future of peace and stability.

May conflict and bloodshed cease in Libya, where defenceless people are once more dying in recent weeks and many families have been forced to abandon their homes. I urge the parties involved to choose dialogue over force and to avoid reopening wounds left by a decade of conflicts and political instability.

May the Living Christ grant his peace to the entire beloved African continent, still rife with social tensions, conflicts and at times violent forms of extremism that leave in their wake insecurity, destruction and death, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. I think too of Sudan, presently experiencing a moment of political uncertainty; it is my hope that all voices will be heard, and that everyone will work to enable the country to find the freedom, development and well-being to which it has long aspired.

May the Risen Lord accompany the efforts of the civil and religious authorities of South Sudan, sustained by the fruits of the spiritual retreat held several days ago here in the Vatican. May a new page open in the history of that country, in which all political, social and religious components actively commit themselves to the pursuit of the common good and the reconciliation of the nation.

May this Easter bring comfort to the people of the eastern regions of Ukraine, who suffer from the continuing conflict. May the Lord encourage initiatives of humanitarian aid and those aimed at pursuing a lasting peace.

May the joy of the resurrection fill the hearts of those who on the American continent are experiencing the effects of difficult political and economic situations. I think in particular of the Venezuelan people, of all those who lack the minimal conditions for leading a dignified and secure life due to a crisis that endures and worsens. May the Lord grant that all those with political responsibilities may work to end social injustices, abuses and acts of violence, and take the concrete steps needed to heal divisions and offer the population the help they need.

May the Risen Lord shed his light on the efforts made in Nicaragua to find as rapidly as possible a peaceful negotiated solution for the benefit of the entire Nicaraguan people.

Before the many sufferings of our time, may the Lord of life not find us cold and indifferent. May he make us builders of bridges, not walls. May the One who gives us his peace end the roar of arms, both in areas of conflict and in our cities, and inspire the leaders of nations to work for an end to the arms race and the troubling spread of weaponry, especially in the economically more advanced countries. May the Risen Christ, who flung open the doors of the tomb, open our hearts to the needs of the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalized, and all those who knock at our door in search of bread, refuge, and the recognition of their dignity.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ is alive! He is hope and youth for each of us and for the entire world. May we let ourselves be renewed by him! Happy Easter!