



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Easter 2018

Dear Friends:

Truly the Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

Today we speak these words which echo back to the first days of Christ's resurrection. After walking with Christ on the road to Calvary, we now joyfully go forth as the disciples did on the road to Emmaus with hearts burning within us. We celebrate the moment when Christ conquered death and gave us all hope of new life.

Even after nearly 2,000 years, that moment of the Resurrection has not lost any of its power. While myths and stories eventually fade, we celebrate a historical fact, a living Person who left behind lasting evidence of his wonders, evidence that the world still seeks to understand.

This is especially true today, as we find ourselves in an historic moment—archeologists have uncovered the site of Jesus' resurrection for the first time in nearly 500 years. Within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, scholars have restored and conducted research on the tomb of Jesus, also known as the Aedicule. Preliminary findings confirm that the heart of the structure is the same tomb that Roman Christians discovered and venerated as early as 326AD.

These findings offer us a great source of confidence in our faith. Scientific progress, rather than finding evidence against what we believe, through missionary archeology has given us a stronger connection with the place of Christ's burial and resurrection. Further, it provides a powerful image as we reflect upon our own spiritual lives this Easter.

In its 2,000-year history, Christ's tomb has endured many trials. It was covered over by slabs of stone, it withstood earthquakes, fires and the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and many believed it had been lost. So too the life of Christ in our hearts can experience highs and lows—it may be covered over with our worries and concerns, it may be jeopardized in times of doubt and confusion, or we may even believe it has faded away.

Yet just as archeologists have opened up this holy site today, we are called this Easter to open our hearts once again to the power of Christ's love and mercy. We are called to remove the barriers from our hearts and allow Christ's glorified wounds to touch our wounds and the wounds of all humanity.

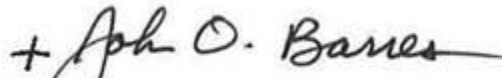
We profoundly experience this reality at the Easter Vigil. In the darkness of the night and in the darkness of our lives, the light of Christ is ignited. Beginning with the Paschal candle, that light is passed on from person to person until the Church is made radiant. The darkness in our hearts is dispelled, and even more beautifully, it is dispelled by the light that is shared by our brothers and sisters in faith. We see in a deeply moving way that Christ's light is spread by each of us who carry him with us. In that moment of unity and love, as the Exsultet proclaims, the Church shakes with joy.

The excitement of that evening is not limited to one day, but extends throughout the eight-day Easter Octave. Each day we are given another story of the Risen Christ, another reason to rejoice. We witness the sorrow of the devoted women at the tomb transform into joy, we see the despair of Christ's disciples transform into hope, and we watch the doubt of St. Thomas transform into faith. And on Divine Mercy Sunday, we celebrate the gift of God's mercy that touches the struggles of our own lives and transforms them into opportunities to grow in holiness. On that day we celebrate the true source of joy in the Gospel, the Good News: we are forgiven our sins and are called by God to strive for sanctity.

During this joyous season then, we recognize that the Risen Christ's presence, his touch, his personal words of assurance tangibly changed the lives of his followers, as they can change our own lives even today. Though Christ ascended into heaven, we remember that we can still have a personal relationship with him through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Church which were given at Pentecost. His presence has never left us.

Indeed most powerfully, Christ's presence remains in the Eucharist. While history tells us Christ lived 2,000 years ago, we know he still lives today. He is waiting in our Churches for us to come spend time with him. He is waiting in our tabernacles for us to come adore him. He is waiting for us to join him at the Mass each Sunday, where we can share in his suffering, death, and resurrection as if we were by his side those many years ago.

We are challenged this Easter to allow Christ to change our lives by his healing touch which gives faith, hope, and love. We commit ourselves to a radical fidelity to Sunday Mass, where Christ can enter our hearts and begin to transform them. And transformed, our hearts will burn within us, driving us all to spread the light of Christ and bring about *dramatic missionary growth* here in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre