

EASTER SUNDAY HOMILY
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DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL

April 12, 2020

I have traditionally greeted at this Easter Sunday Mass at St. Agnes Cathedral our college students who have returned home for Easter. I always ask them to stand and the packed crowds applaud with appreciation.

This morning, through this national telecast, I greet college students from all over the nation. Most of you are home working on your classes long distance, doing a lot of zoom time both academically and socially.

Whether you are at Stony Brook University, Hofstra University, Adelphi University, Molloy College or one of the fine Community Colleges here on Long Island, whether you are back home from St. John's University, Cornell or Columbia University, Providence College, Clemson University, Lehigh University, Steubenville University, the Ohio State University, the University of Texas, or the University of Southern California, I want to thank you all for the inspirational way you witness to your Catholic faith at the great universities of this country and your radical fidelity to the Sunday Mass celebrated on your university campuses.

I also thank our children, our teens, our high school students for the wonderful way you trust and rejoice in the power of the Risen Christ streaming through your lives in these challenging times of the COVID-19 crisis. We are so proud of each and every one of you!

I would like all of you to stand up in your living rooms and receive my prayers, applause and appreciation along with that of Bishop William

Murphy, the great priests of St. Agnes Cathedral, and your own parents and families who are with you at home!

The 20th Chapter of the Gospel of John presents us with the image of the Empty Tomb. And that image leaves us with a question. What drove Mary of Magdala to the tomb early that morning?

Was it a broken heart trying to find some resolution in the midst of terrible confusion?

Was it the steadfast loyalty of a strong and determined woman who still had some fading sense of hope?

Was it some beautiful unconscious intuition in which her memories of Jesus and his prophetic words and wisdom made her realize deep down that the Crucifixion could not simply end with death and a sealed tomb?

Mary was led to that Empty Tomb the way that you and I are led to that same Empty Tomb this Easter Sunday morning as the world continues to experience the traumas, tragedies, fears, and financial, economic and employment upheavals of the COVID-19 crisis.

Peter and John's race to the tomb reminds us of the urgency in our short fragile lives on earth to find the Risen Christ and to love him with all our mind, heart, soul and strength.

Peter had so recently betrayed Christ. He still had the bitter memory of the cock crowing three times ringing in his ears and in his repentant heart.

In his Palm Sunday homily, Pope Francis explored our own betrayals of the Lord: "Let us look within. If we are honest with ourselves, we will see our infidelities. How many falsehoods, hypocrisies and duplicities! How many good intentions betrayed! How many broken promises! How many resolutions left unfulfilled! The Lord knows our hearts better than we do. He knows how weak and irresolute we are, how many times we fall, how hard it is for us to get up and how difficult it is to heal certain wounds...(Jesus) healed us by taking upon himself our infidelity and by taking from us our betrayals.

Instead of being discouraged by the fear of failing, we can now look upon the crucifix (and) feel his embrace.”

This morning we stand inside the Empty Tomb with Peter among the burial cloths.

We stand in a sad but repentant solidarity with Peter’s betrayal of Christ, his weakness, his cowardice, his fear and, at times, his paralysis.

We also stand in solidarity with the courageous Peter, Peter the Rock, as portrayed in the first reading from the 10th Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter proclaims the Risen Lord boldly, courageously and decisively. He holds nothing back.

We contrast Peter’s shame as he heard the cock crow three times with the Peter illumined by the Fire and Light of the Resurrection.

In his *Urbi et Orbi* Easter messages to the Church and the World this morning, Pope Francis said that the Risen Christ’s glorified wounds are “wounds that are windows of hope.”

He asked us to pray for an end to the pandemic and also asked for powerful prayers of peace for so many troubled areas of our world – Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, the need for productive dialogue between Israeli and Palestinians, Mozambique, Eastern regions of the Ukraine and the plight of the global refugee -- that need the peace of the Risen Lord.

Wounds become windows. We see that in Peter. The glorified wounds of the Risen Christ touched the wounds of Peter the way they touch our wounds and the wounds of the world on this Easter Sunday morning.

We marvel at the change in Peter and we stand in solidarity with Peter open to change, open to our own personal conversion and resurrection right in the midst of the Paschal Mystery shining at the heart of the COVID-19 experience.

The Risen Christ stands ready to walk through the padlocked doors of our hearts that prevent us from fully embracing the Paschal Mystery and life-giving conversion.

The Holy Father said that in the face of the tragedy of the pandemic so many of our false securities in life have crumbled.

On this Easter Sunday morning, we surrender our false securities and illusions. We drop all our conversion defense mechanisms.

We ask the Risen Lord to roll the stones of fear and sin away from our true hearts, hearts on Fire with the Risen Christ, hearts that with the Risen Lord have come to cast Fire on the earth.