

Easter Sunday Homily 2021
Homily of Bishop John Barres
St. Agnes Cathedral
April 4, 2021

On this Easter Sunday 2021, the Church presents us the beginning of the 20th Chapter of the Gospel of John. Mary of Magdala comes to the tomb of Christ in the darkness of early morning and finds the stone has mysteriously been removed from the Tomb.

She goes to Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved and brings them back running to the tomb. They enter the Empty Tomb and discover Our Lord's burial cloths. The beloved disciple sees and believes.

In entering the Empty Tomb this Easter Sunday morning, we confront our own tombs, our own mortality, our own graves, our own deaths in the Light of the Risen Christ.

I can still remember in the Summer of 1967 my parents taking our family to Nisky Hill Moravian Cemetery in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It is a beautiful and scenic cemetery on a hill that looks out over Lehigh University and what remains of the Bethlehem Steel Stacks.

I was six years old at the time and my father showed me the gravestones of my grandparents Oliver (1877-1963) and Matilda Barres (1882-1957) and my great grandparents from Mengerschied, Hunsreuck in Prussia Jacob (1829-1886) and Maryann (1836-1910) Barres and other extended family members.

I have a vivid memory of this moment of confronting the reality of death and the reality that the people buried beneath these old and weathered gravestones were mysteriously connected to my parents, my sisters and brother, and to me.

It was truly an existential moment of wonder for a six year old boy who did not know at that time that he would one day return, as the Catholic Bishop of Allentown, Pennsylvania, to bury his parents – Oliver (1921-2012) in 2012 and Marjorie (1922-2014) in 2014 -- in that very same cemetery plot.

The Light of the Risen Lord illumines all our future graves, our tombs and our family cemetery plots.

What a difference to contemplate our own death in the Light of the Risen Christ and our firm and confident belief in Eternal Life.

The Sacred Scriptures are filled with references to tombs that foreshadow Our Lord's Empty Tomb on Easter morning.¹

Here are some examples:

Psalms 49 reads: "Anyone can see that the wisest die, the fool and the senseless pass away too. Tombs are their homes forever. This is the destiny of those who trust in folly." Here tombs symbolize human folly and the foolish idols that people worship which result in spiritual death.

In the Gospel of Mark Chapter 5, a man possessed by an unclean spirit dwells among the tombs. Here tombs symbolize the slavery of demonic possession and spiritual death. We know that the Lord liberates this possessed man revealing his power and victory over evil.

In the Gospel of John Chapter 11, Jesus says to those gathered at the tomb of Lazarus: "Take away the stone," and He cries: "Lazarus come forth" and Lazarus emerges in his burial cloths from his tomb. John 11 reveals and foreshadows how Jesus triumphs over death.

All these references to tombs in the Old Testament and the New Testament (and there are many more) foreshadow and point to the Empty Tomb of Easter Morning.

As we enter the Empty Tomb with Peter and John this morning, we ask the Risen Christ to roll away the stones that obstruct the flow of grace in the Church's mission.

For instance, consider our Holy Father Pope Francis' words in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013). He speaks about the "pastoral acedia" (82) or lukewarmness, the cynicism, disillusionment and lack of deep and true faith that can obstruct the Church's global mission. He writes: "A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum." (83)

¹ Cf. Father Peter John Cameron, OP's "Blessings for the Graces of the Easter Tomb," in the April 2021 *Magnificat* (Vol. 23, No. 2), 6-9. Bishop Barres is expanding with further reflection on some of Fr. Cameron's insights.

On this Easter morning, we ask the Holy Spirit to de-mummify our Catholic witness in the public square. We ask the Holy Spirit to roll away the stones of sin, fear, anger, resentment, skepticism, doubt, resistance and rebellion from our hearts.

We ask the Holy Spirit to expel any dimension of a “Tomb Psychology” in the way we live.

We ask the Holy Spirit to take us from a “Tomb Psychology” to an “Empty Tomb Psychology” that trusts in the Victory of the Risen Christ.

Pope Francis’ recent Apostolic Journey to Iraq exemplifies the Risen Lord “Empty Tomb Psychology” which animates his spirit of global mission and universal fraternity. He brought joy and hope - he brought the Risen Christ - to the people of Iraq. May the Holy Father’s example in Baghdad, Ur, and Mosul inspire us to be bold evangelizers and fervent messengers of hope on this Easter Sunday Morning!

The holy and glorious wounds of the Risen Christ touch our wounds so that we can be the Risen Christ’s instruments in helping to heal the wounds of the Church and the world.

We remember in a special way this Easter morning our Catholic Gospel of Life and Social Justice call to continue to touch the wounds of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the wounds of racism in our country and the wounds of the world described by Pope Francis this morning in his Easter Message (*Urbi et Orbi*) to the City of Rome and to the World.

On this Easter morning, we celebrate the Risen Lord’s dazzling Communion of Saints. Every saint was formed and forged in the biblical passages of the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. Every saint was forged in the Resurrection Appearances and Narratives that we will celebrate in the Easter Octave and throughout the Easter season.

Every saint lived in their unique moment of history an “Empty Tomb Psychology.”

We celebrate this Easter Sunday morning in the Year of St. Joseph proclaimed by Pope Francis. St. Joseph is the Patron of the Universal Church, the Patron of Workers, the Just Man, the husband and the father serving and helping to lead the Holy Family. St. Joseph, we ask your intercession for the Church. Together, we *Go to Joseph!*

We celebrate this Easter Morning the recent October 10, 2020 Beatification of Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) who calls the young people of the world – children, teens,

university students and young adults -- to avoid being bland photocopies and to embrace their unique baptismal call and adventure to holiness.

We celebrate this Easter Morning the October 31, 2020 Beatification of Fr. Michael J. McGivney (1852-1890), the founder of the Knights of Columbus. Blessed Fr. McGivney represents all the holy American priests who have helped build our Church and our country with their intrepid missionary spirit.

We celebrate this Easter Morning knowing that we will celebrate on May 20, 2021 the 500th Anniversary of St. Ignatius of Loyola's conversion (1491-1556) after he was wounded at the Battle of Pamplona.

This Anniversary begins an Ignatian Year celebrating the Jesuit charism in the history of the Church and the World. How appropriate at a moment in Church history when our Holy Father Pope Francis is a son of St. Ignatius and St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises.

We can all pray on this Easter Morning that this coming Ignatian Year will lead to St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, being proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

Happy Easter to you and your families! May the Light of the Risen Christ lead us and guide us to holiness. May each of us have an intrepid and adventurous Catholic missionary spirit animated by an "Empty Tomb Psychology"!

He is Risen, Alleluia!

