

EASTER SUNDAY 2022

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

April 17, 2021

In these days of international crisis, war, death and the heart-breaking plight of war refugees, we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on this Easter Sunday¹ morning.

In these days, we think deeply about the arc of history and the connection of events and ideas in history.

A few weeks ago, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis and the universal Church prayed for the consecration of Ukraine, Russia and the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The Holy Father prayed these words in his *Act of Consecration*: “O Mary, Mother of God and our Mother...you never cease to guide us to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Yet we have strayed from that path of peace. We have forgotten the lesson learned from the tragedies of the last century, the sacrifice of the millions who fell in two world wars.”

In praying these words, the Holy Father reminds us of what the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) once said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

As we look at the horrendous evil that is occurring in Ukraine today, we see before our own eyes how evil repeats itself in history and how humanity so often seems not to learn from the lessons of history and thus is condemned to repeat it.

¹ For an analysis of the theological, liturgical, spiritual and historical dimension of Easter Sunday in the Catholic Church, see Bishop Barres’ Holy Week 2020 Pastoral Letter, *The Great Week: A Pilgrimage with the Lord in Holy Week*, 20. It is available on the diocesan website: drvc.org.

The consequences of original sin play out each day, each decade and each century in history. And always the poor, the defenseless and the destitute bear much of the brunt of the resulting savagery.

In this *Year of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, we think of one of St. Ignatius' 19th Century Jesuit priest-poet sons from England, Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889). He reflected on God's presence in history in his poem *God's Grandeur*. Hopkins writes in the first stanza of that poem:

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.”

There is something about the line in this poem – “Generations have trod, have trod, have trod” – that captures with the poet's gift the consequences of original sin and the constant temptations against hope that humanity experiences.

And, without the Cross, history does so often seem hopeless. The Culture of Death so often seems to reign. Not only does it reign in the mass graves near Kyiv – so reminiscent of the mass graves of Jews next to Kyiv at Babi Yar in 1941 – but it reigns in our cities and even in many of our hospitals where unborn babies are euphemistically called the “products of conception” and killed because they are deemed inconvenient. And the Culture of Death and the Dictatorship of Relativism not only eliminate the weak and the helpless, but create a sense of despair that affects us all.²

² Bishop Barré is in solidarity with our Holy Father Pope Francis' April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday *Urbi et Orbi (To the City and the World) Message*: “I hold in my heart all the many Ukrainian victims, the millions of refugees and

Humanity experiences this ache of a seemingly constant and meaningless despair as it repeats the tragic mistakes of eras and epochs gone by.

“Generations have trod, have trod, have trod...”

“Generations have trod, have trod, have trod” through the deadly trenches of World War I and through the starvation genocide in Ukraine in the early 1930’s to the death camps and execution pits of World War II and every 20th and 21st century human tragedy.

So many of those tragedies were founded upon philosophies and ideas that rejected the idea that humans have a higher purpose and treat with contempt the spiritual nature of humanity.

And yet, it remains the case that a light shines in this vast field of darkness. As Gerard Manley Hopkins states, “the world is charged with the grandeur of God.” How can that be? How can the poet say “Generations have trod, have trod, have trod...” and say at the same time and in the same poem that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God” as we see horrific images of war, devastation and inhuman massacres in Ukraine?

The answer to this question is simple and yet deep. We can say this because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the “fulcrum”³ of salvation and world history. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and his Resurrection brings hope to the world.

Pope Benedict XVI states: “The resurrection of Jesus is an eruption of light. Death is conquered, the tomb is thrown open. The Risen One himself is Light, the Light of the world. With the resurrection, the Lord’s day enters the nights of history. Beginning with the resurrection, God’s light spreads throughout the world and throughout history.”⁴

That is what we celebrate on this Easter Sunday.

internally displaced persons, the divided families, the elderly left to themselves, the lives broken and the cities razed to the ground. I see the faces of the orphaned children fleeing from the war. As we look at them, we cannot help but hear their cry of pain, along with that of all those other children who suffer throughout our world: those dying of hunger or lack of medical care, those who are victims of abuse and violence, and those denied the right to be born.”

³ Pope St. John Paul II’s 1998 Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, 2.

⁴ Pope Benedict’s *Easter Vigil Homily*, April 11, 2009

New Testament biblical scholar N.T. Wright says that the confusion of humanity in history is present on Easter Sunday.

He writes: “The Easter stories are full of people getting the wrong end of the stick. Mary thinks Jesus’ body has been stolen. Peter, sees the linen wrappings and can’t work out what it’s all about. The disciples didn’t understand the Scriptures. The angels question Mary, and she still doesn’t know what’s going on. Then she thinks Jesus is the gardener. Then, it seems, she reaches out to cling to him, and he tells her she mustn’t. You could hardly get more misunderstandings into a couple of paragraphs if you tried.

The point is, of course, that Easter has burst into our world – the world of space, time, and matter, real history and real people and real life – but our minds and imaginations are too small to contain it. So, we do our best to put the sea into the bottle and fit the explosive fact of the Resurrection into the possibilities we already know about.”⁵

We pray on this Easter Sunday 2022 the Risen Lord may open our eyes, hearts, minds and imaginations to his Easter power and to his Easter grace.

May the eruption of Christ’s Light from the Empty Tomb enlighten and illumine the world’s darkness. May the Risen Christ lead us to heroic and courageous holiness so that we can be instruments of His Peace to change the world.⁶

⁵ 2008 Easter Sermon of N.T. Wright available on line.

⁶ In his April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday *Urbi et Orbi (To the City and the World) Message*, our Holy Father has asked us to pray for Ukraine, Poland, Russia, the Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Canada.