

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EASTER VIGIL, APRIL 11, 2020
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness to all of you, assuring you of his prayers, as we celebrate this most solemn Vigil of the Lord's Resurrection, the pinnacle of the Church's liturgical year. In a special way, I want to express not only the Holy Father's closeness but also mine to the sick and suffering and to those who care for them. I greet all those joining this liturgy by television and the internet and invite you to enter, with me, into the Paschal Victory of Christ.

The *Exsultet*, sung at the beginning of this liturgy, contains these words: *Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness.* The contrast of Easter joy with what the whole world has been experiencing these past few weeks could not be greater, and yet amid the darkness of these days, we are reminded that *"Christ is the one Morning Star, who never sets ... who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity ..."*

The recent events have forced each of us to look deeper at our life and to contemplate our own mortality and our final destiny. Quite unexpectedly, we have found ourselves to be fragile, and not merely physically fragile. Too often we have been closed in our certainties, whether theological certainties or those certainties that have come from scientific discoveries and from rapid advances in technology. Collectively, we had built an illusory world in which we, like our first parents, wanted to be like gods, fashioning ourselves to be the masters of this world.

We are in shock at a more realistic scenario: man is weak, fragile, and can discover his greatness and strength only in love, but this love first came from Him. The Father sent His only Son into the world to save man, who was too weak, too powerless to save himself. The damage done by our first parents would be undone by the One who was true God and true man. As the *Exsultet* says: *"O love, O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son! O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ! O happy fault that earned so great a Redeemer!"*

Through the scriptures this evening, we traced how God planned to save us. According to St. Irenaeus, "For those who pleased him, he set down, like an architect, his plan of salvation." This evening we are wrapped in wonder at the masterful design of the Divine Architect. Not even human disobedience and the greatest efforts of the Evil One could thwart God's plan.

The sin of Adam prompted an act of mercy by the Father in sending the Son to be our Redeemer. This Son, whom the Father sent into the world, loved perfectly, even to the point of death, but His love was stronger than death. Through the power of his love *Christian believers are set apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of death. ... This is the night, when Christ broke the prison bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.*

If humankind's pride had led to the spread of sin like a contagion, so too through His humility, Christ offered us the medicine of mercy as a remedy. The outpouring of His precious Blood and His three days in the tomb are a supreme act of humility, for which the Father raised Him from the grave! His victory over the powers of death *dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen and joy to mourners.*

For even though in our contemporary circumstances, we mourn our sick and our dead, in Him, we have hope for something better. His victory helps us look forward in hope to our destiny – sharing in the life of the Trinity eternally. Christ comes to save us from sin and death and offers us life! This is the Good News that we must share. God does not abandon us. Christ's earthly life, His perfect example, and His passage from death to life remind us that we can be saved through imitation of Him, and so recover our status as children of God by adoption. The necessary sin of Adam was destroyed *completely* by the Death of Christ!

Now He offers us life! But do we take Him up on His offer? What we have been experiencing these past weeks with the coronavirus will not leave us unchanged. Nothing will be as it was before. Will we be better or worse? That depends on us and our openness to the power of the Risen Lord. Like all great illnesses and plagues that have marked human history, these moments can be for us an opportunity to amend our life and to be converted. He makes all things new – even us!

Without God, we lose our bearings on life, but with the Risen Lord, we discover once again true life! Where once there was only death, with God there is the hope for life in abundance here and in eternity, for He is Risen! Alleluia!