

**HOMILY BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
EASTER VIGIL  
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
APRIL 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the personal representative of Pope Francis to the United States of America, it is my honor and privilege to convey to you the Holy Father's spiritual closeness and paternal affection. On behalf of His Holiness, and from my own heart: Happy Easter!

"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb."

What were they looking for? Perhaps they wanted to feel close to Jesus, just like we visit the burial places of those we love, in order to feel close to them. Maybe they wanted a chance to reflect on the events that had taken place in the preceding days. The evangelist Mark says that they took spices to anoint Jesus.<sup>1</sup> But suddenly, an earthquake shook up their plans. An angel appeared who rolled back the stone, and the guards were paralyzed with fear. To the women, the angel gave two instructions. First, "Do not be afraid!" And second, "Go quickly and tell his disciples" that Jesus is risen from the dead.

In spite of the angel's exhortation not to be afraid, the women *were*, in fact, "fearful yet overjoyed" as they ran to the disciples and "Jesus met them on their way and greeted them." After they embraced his feet in homage, Jesus repeated the two instructions that the angel had given: *Do not be afraid*; and, *Go and tell the others*.

**My friends, now that Jesus encounters *us* in his resurrection, he gives us the same instructions that he gave the two Marys: first, *Do not be afraid*; and second, *Go and tell others this good news*.**

For the last 40 days, we have engaged in a struggle with our weaknesses and sins. Most likely, we have experienced a mixture of success and failure. But hopefully, in the midst of that struggle, we have noticed something that is truly decisive: the fact that *Jesus looks at us with mercy* and he loves us. If we are able to receive this look of mercy from him, then we are inspired to see other people in the same way that Jesus sees us: weak and imperfect, but worthy of our love.

Now that we have reached this Easter Vigil, our time of repentance has led us through a contemplation of the death of Jesus, to the arrival of the women at an empty tomb. In spite of everything

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *Mark* 16:1.

that our sins have done to the Son of God, he has somehow been raised from the dead! No longer in the tomb, he is going to Galilee, where it all began, to meet his brothers.

When Jesus repeats to the women, “Do not be afraid,” he knows that fear will be their natural response. But he wants to make sure that their joy is *greater* than their fear when they carry the message to the brothers. After all, the disciples who are being summoned to Galilee might have reason to fear! They are being called to a meeting by their master and teacher, whom most of them had abandoned in his hour of greatest need. Even though he had predicted everything that would happen to him – “that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly...and be killed and on the third day be raised”<sup>2</sup> – they had failed to listen or understand. And now he wanted to see them! Who *wouldn't* be afraid? What would he say to them? What would he *do* to them? What justice would the vindicated Son of God have for them who had failed him? If the disciples were trembling with fear, it would be understandable. And so, it was important that the women would proclaim the message of Jesus' resurrection in a spirit of *joy*. The women's joy might give hope to the men – a hope that would carry them to Galilee. So too, if *we* are to be messengers of the good news of Jesus, our joy must be greater than our fear.

We know, of course, the rest of the story. We will hear about it at Mass in the days to come. When Jesus encountered the disciples after the resurrection, his first words to them were words of peace and the assurance not to be afraid. *This* was the just judge! This was the God of mercy! His desire was first of all to forgive the ones who had failed him – with barely a word of rebuke – and having forgiven them, to *equip them for their mission*: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.”<sup>3</sup>

My brothers and sisters, do you hear these words, these instructions from Jesus? How do you plan to live them? Are you afraid because you have “failed” at Lent this year? Are you saying to Jesus, “Give me a couple more weeks, and I'll make good on my promises: to fast, to do penance, to pray”? “I'll try harder next year, Jesus, and then I'll be ready to be your disciple.” To be sure, there *are* still times for penance, and our prayer must remain constant. But in the meantime, we must “Go”! Notwithstanding our weakness and imperfection, you and I are the ones called to announce the Gospel: to proclaim to others that the One who has saved us is here to save them too; and not only that, but to make them his disciples! “Don't be afraid” to make this proclamation, says Jesus. It is *I* who am with you. Receive my Holy Spirit, and proclaim the good news of salvation to everyone whom you encounter.

What a different story this is from any other story that has ever been told! What a “strange” God we have. He loved and cared for the people he created; and in response, they rejected and killed his Son. He raised that Son from the dead, not in order to condemn the guilty, but to save the repentant, and to commission them to be his representatives to the world! The “strangeness” of God is his *mercy*, which is beyond what anyone has ever seen. This, my brothers and sisters, is the God whom we serve. What better choice is there than to believe in him, to accept his kindness, and to do all we can to draw others into his family. Let's not be afraid. Instead, let us “Go”, and tell others what he has done for us.

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<sup>2</sup> *Matthew* 16:21.

<sup>3</sup> *Matthew* 28:19.