

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
 APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 EASTER VIGIL, APRIL 20, 2019
 BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
 WASHINGTON, D.C.**

My dear friends in Christ, this evening we celebrate the greatest feast of victory in history. We celebrate the ultimate conquest of evil, the triumph of love, the reason for our hope, and the definitive statement that God does not leave us in darkness and fear. He is victorious over sin and death! He is alive! He is Risen!

To all present in this National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and to those who are spiritually united with us through the Eternal Word Television Network, especially those who are homebound or alone, may the peace of the Risen Lord be with you! As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative to the United States, I wish to express his spiritual closeness and his affection for you as precious members of the flock.

Tonight, we heard Saint Luke's account of that first, Easter morning. The women were bewildered when they arrived at the open tomb. They were afraid. They did not find the body of the Lord. Two men appeared to them, telling them to remember the words of Jesus. The women returned to tell the Apostles what they had seen and heard, but the Eleven did not believe them, thinking that they were speaking nonsense. They did not yet believe.

Nevertheless, Peter returned to the tomb. Perhaps, he thought, "There must be some truth to what they are saying." He too went to the open tomb, saw the burial cloths, and went home amazed, wondering to himself what had happened. He did not understand the significance of what all of this meant.

Neither he, nor the women, made sense of the words of the two men clothed in white: *Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? These two men at the tomb told the women: Remember what He said to you while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and rise on the third day.*

The disciples were imprisoned, trapped in their fears and in their sense of loss, because they had forgotten His words. The invitation to *remember what He said to you* was another way of saying: Remember His promises! Have hope!

They, of course, had lost hope, because they had different ideas of what type of Messiah He would be. They lost hope, because they had forgotten His prophetic words and His promises. They remained completely consumed by the darkness of their present situation.

What are some of the things He had said? Consider just a few phrases from St. John's Gospel:

I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me though He die, he shall live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

I am the Bread of Life ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

I am the Light of the World. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

I am the Good Shepherd ... I lay down my life, that I may take it up again.

Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up”.

Jesus had foretold his suffering and His Resurrection three times. In His third prediction of His Passion, He said: *For he will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. They will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise.*

The disciples remembered the first part of the prediction but not the second: *On the third day, He will rise.* They had forgotten His words. It is so easy for us to fall into the same trap – to see only the problems and the storms of daily life, forgetting His words and His promises of something new and something better. How many Christians easily fall into this trap – living without hope? They profess with their lips to be Christian. They go to Church on Sunday, but do they believe in His words? Do they believe that He is truly Risen?!!!

Is Jesus really in the midst of us? In the center of your family? In your life? Do you walk each day with the Risen Lord? Sometimes, amid great problems and crises in our life, we bury everything, including His words of hope, His promises, and even His Presence. We journey through life, trapped in things that are simply not life-giving or forward-looking. The words of the men clothed in white should pierce our hearts: *Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?*

Dwelling in our negativity, we will never succeed in remembering His words and promises. And if we do not remember what he told us, we will never have hope and never emerge from the prisons of our present situation. This is true even for the Church! We risk living in fear, seeing only the present difficulties, stuck in our unbelief that the God of surprises can change our situation.

In his first celebration of the Easter Vigil six years ago, Pope Francis said:

“Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think we will not be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up: there are no situations that God cannot change, there is no sin that He cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to Him” (Pope Francis, Homily at the Easter Vigil, 30 March 2013).

Our hope is in the Risen Lord. Our hope is in His promises. He has kept His word. He promised that He would Rise. He is Risen! His words are true. He promised that if we believe in Him, we too will rise and live forever. Even when we lose a loved one, the hope in the resurrection – the hope of seeing them again in heaven – sustains us.

Hope is a distinguishing characteristic of Christian faith. Saint Paul wrote in his Letter to the Ephesians, reminding the flock of what they were like before their encounter with Christ; they were *“without hope and without God in the world.”* Of the hope offered by Christ, Saint Paul wrote in the Letter to the Romans: *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us ... In hope, we were saved. (Rom 8:24) For*

this reason, Paul also wrote in his First Letter to the Thessalonians that we *must not grieve as others do who have no hope*.

We have hope. Christ the Risen Lord is our hope. He turns the sadness of the tomb into a place of triumph and joy! He is not buried. He is alive! *Why do you search for the Living One among the Dead?* This Easter, it is my hope and prayer, for you and your families, that you would remember His words and have hope.

Some people say that we all need to be more optimistic. But optimism is a psychological attitude. Christian hope is a gift of God, a virtue placed in our hearts, founded on the promises of God that give our life direction. The Christian who takes to heart the message of Easter – that He is Risen – can never remain trapped in the darkness of the present. There is always the future. We do not know what awaits, but we do know that our life will not end in emptiness.

In accepting this, we are able to live our present reality well, knowing that He is with us. He is not dead. He is alive. He walks with us each day. Thus, the message of Easter is not merely Good News to be communicated. The message of Easter is life-changing! The person who has hope in the Risen Lord lives differently, because of His abiding Presence. The believer has been granted the gift of a new life. That is the gift that the Risen Lord brings to us: new life!

This Easter, let us be a People of Life, who proclaim to the whole world: Christ is our Hope! He is Risen! Alleluia!