

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2019
CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER, BETHESDA, MARYLAND

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, in communion with our Holy Father, I wish you a Happy and Peace-filled Easter! As the Apostolic Nuncio, I express the Holy Father's spiritual closeness to you and your loved ones as we celebrate the Victory of our Risen Lord! I thank your pastor, Monsignor Peter Vaghi, who has invited me again to celebrate this holiest of days with you at Little Flower Church. It is a joy to be with you as the Church exclaims: He is Risen!

"Christ, our Paschal lamb, has been sacrificed!" On this Easter Day, the newness of the Resurrection rings forth in these words from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The central symbol of salvation history – the Paschal Lamb – is identified with Jesus. The Hebrew Passover recalled the liberation from slavery in Egypt and required that each family share a lamb for their meal.

Last night at the Easter Vigil, the deacon sang the *Exultet*, which included these words: *These, then, are the feasts of Passover, in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb, whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers. This is the night, when once you led our forebearers, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod though the Red Sea.*

Through His suffering and death, Christ revealed Himself as the Lamb of God, "sacrificed" on the Cross, to take away the sins of the world. His Blood anoints our doorposts. He died at the very hour when the lambs in the Temple of Jerusalem were sacrificed. He was, in the words of St. Ambrose, "the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of Sacrifice." He is the One who leads from the slavery of sin and death to freedom and life.

The meaning of His saving sacrifice was anticipated during the Last Supper, when He substituted Himself – under the signs of bread and wine – for the ritual food of the Passover meal. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Chalice of our salvation. In the Paschal Mystery, He brought to fulfillment the tradition of the old Passover and transformed it into *his* Passover. He was to journey from death to life, thereby opening for us the Way to Salvation. By dying, He destroyed our death. By rising, He restored our life. His Resurrection makes all things new!

He gives new meaning to the Paschal Feast! From this, we also see how St. Paul uses the term "leaven". *Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed.*

At Passover, it was necessary for the Jews to remove from the household every tiny scrap of leavened bread. Again, this recalled what had happened when they escaped from Egypt. They left their old life in haste, bringing with them only unleavened bread. This "unleavened bread" was a symbol of purification: removing the old to make space for the

new. In Christ, this Hebrew tradition acquires a new meaning, derived from the new “Exodus” – Jesus’ passage from death to eternal life. At the Transfiguration, He had spoken to Elijah and Moses about *his* exodus. In His Death and Resurrection, we see more clearly what Peter, James and John had merely glimpsed – the glory of God!

Since Christ, the true Lamb, sacrificed himself for us, we, his disciples – through him – can be the “new dough”, the “unleavened bread”, freed from every remaining element of the old yeast of sin. As little and insignificant as we seem in the world’s eyes, we can, to paraphrase Saint Paul, *do all things in Him who strengthens us*. Saint Paul reminds us that even *a little yeast leavens the dough!* This is what our world needs – the Presence of Christ – in the lives of men and women – making things new, through lives changed by an encounter with the Risen Lord.

Let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. This invitation from Saint Paul asks us to open our hearts to Christ. The Risen Lord has the power to forgive us and renew us, to make us whole again. If we ask Him, He will remove the poison of sin and death and replace it with the life-blood of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

There are so many challenges in our lives, in our world, to maintaining hope. We see our own failures. We are tempted to think that the poison of malice and sin have so infected us that death will have the final word. We are tempted to think that evil will overtake us, that we will be swallowed up by the violence and cruelty of sin that confront us every day. But today, we remember that there is a Love stronger than Death.

Christ our Risen Lord gives us hope – hope for a better life, the hope of newness of Life in and through Him. We have been baptized in hope. We belong to Christ, the source of our strength. And because we will one day rise with Him, we profess our faith in union with the whole of the one, worshipping universal Church: “I look forward to the Resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

The newness of the Resurrection stretches even to the darkest regions of the human heart and calls even to those who seldom come to church: “Let us celebrate the feast...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Yes, we are invited to celebrate the feast, not only here in Church, but above all with our hearts and our lives, with a manner of life that is “unleavened” – for He is truly Risen.

In the early Church there was a custom whereby the Bishop or priest, after the homily, would command the faithful: “*Conversi ad Dominum*” – turn towards the Lord. This meant in the first place that they would turn towards the East, towards the rising sun, the sign of Christ returning, whom we rush out to meet when we celebrate the Eucharist. But this external gesture was merely a sign of what was to happen interiorly: *conversion*. Thus, we leave behind the old dough of sin – rejecting Satan and his evil works and empty promises – and turn toward the Lord – with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Conversion is really the turning of our soul towards Jesus Christ and thus towards the living God, towards the true light. The Paschal Candle reminds of the Light of Christ. He is the *one Morning Star who never sets, who coming back from death’s domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity and lives and reigns forever and ever*. Amen. Alleluia!