

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS OF EASTER SUNDAY
CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER
BETHESDA, MARYLAND – APRIL 20, 2025**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Easter!

It's good to join you again for this annual Easter celebration. Thank you, Father, for your invitation.

On behalf of Pope Francis, thank you all for your prayers, which have helped the Holy Father to slowly re-gain his health. We're grateful that he was able to emerge from the hospital and join the Church in celebrating the Lord's Resurrection.

+ + +

As we hear the story of the empty tomb in today's Mass, it reminds me of something that the Pope says many times: **Our faith is not like a “museum piece”—a memory of the past.**

To be clear: *Memory* is an important part of our faith. For instance, since it is Easter Sunday, some of you may be here at Mass for the first time in a while. What brings you here? You are here because, even if you no longer go to church every Sunday, you *remember* that it is part of your personal history. You *remember* when you were young and this was something you did as a family. And that *memory* leads you back to something that still has value for you. Thank God! And welcome! You are welcome to come back next week too! (I won't be here next week, but you can still come!)

Memory is important for all of us. I have my own memories of growing up in my Catholic family in Saint-Malo in Brittany, in the north of France. For my mother, the Catholic faith was never something “stiff” and unnatural. We learned in our home what it meant to be “Church”. It was normal, and it was something very human.

God gave us *memory*, so that we can remain attached to those things which have lasting value. And nothing has more value than our faith, which is another way of saying: our relationship with God. But this is what's so important: Faith is a *relationship*. It is not a "thing". It is not an ideology. And it's not an artifact in a museum. Our faith, like any relationship, is something alive. It must grow. It must change over time. It must mature.

A good example of this is the relationship we have with a friend. Even when we have a very good friend, the friendship cannot remain totally exclusive, cut off from the outside world and other people. This is not healthy. In a healthy friendship, the two friends remain open: open to other people, and open to the world – which allows us to grow.

This is how it is with our faith. Our faith is not something just to console ourselves so that we can cut ourselves off from the outside world, from ideas that challenge us, and from people whom we don't like. Rather, our faith—our relationship with God—is something that we share with our fellow believers, including ones who are different from us. That is why we are part of a community. That is why we have a parish. Our diversity finds harmony in the Catholic faith that we share, our unity becomes stronger, and our own faith grows.

Then, as individuals and as a community, we recognize that this relationship with God is something that we need to announce to others. This is what evangelization is. It means that we share with others our love of God, so that they too can have an encounter with our friend, Jesus Christ, and with the Church.

In this way, faith stops being something we keep on a shelf in a museum. Instead of a memory of the past, it becomes a living reality in the present. And this means change, growth, newness.

+ + +

In today's Gospel, Peter and John faced something which challenged their faith. There was an empty tomb! Even though they had been in a very close relationship with Jesus for three years, they had still not understood his teaching about the Resurrection. But now, they faced something that they did not expect and

which they couldn't explain: Jesus had died, they had laid his body in the tomb, and now the tomb was empty.

Thankfully, even though the two disciples did not understand completely, they were open to believing something new. Eventually, they had a personal encounter with the risen Lord together with the other Apostles, and their faith expanded to a belief in the Resurrection. Their relationship with God reached a greater maturity. Instead of remembering a great teacher from the past, they now followed the living Savior of the world, who was still active in his Church. This process of growth and change in their faith kept happening for the rest of their lives.

Do you see the lesson for us? Christ is still alive today! He is moving in his Church, and he wants us to move with him! We are grateful for the past, but we are called to follow Christ in the present. And to let our faith continue to grow.

When we live in this way, God will sometimes surprise us. As Pope Francis is fond of saying, God likes to surprise us.

I have been Catholic all my life, nearly 80 years, and I have worked for the Church the majority of that time; and sometimes I still get surprised by what God does!

This is healthy. We need to have a faith that is always open to *more* – always ready to experience something “new”. The essential truth about God doesn't change, but our capacity to understand the meaning of God's presence in the world grows.

+ + +

While Peter and John were walking away from the empty tomb, they must have reflected on what they had just seen. In some way they had to come to terms with the fact: “Christ is alive! And this ‘life’ is something far greater and more mysterious than we imagined.”

Brothers and sisters, I hope that we can have the same sort of thoughts as Peter and John, and to make the same commitment that they made: “Let's continue to look for Jesus. And then, let's continue to follow him as part of the Church. Let's go wherever this new life leads us.”