

*Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad today. Alleluia.*

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all of you a most blessed and happy Easter. In a special way, we want to welcome all of our visitors and all who have returned home to Little Flower to celebrate Easter.

Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his definitive triumph over sin, suffering, sickness, and death. To the Romans, Paul wrote, "...*Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him*" [6:9]. More importantly for us, rising from the dead, Christ became a life-giving Spirit [I Cor. 15:45]. Therefore, through baptism, we are able to enter into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising. In the words of St. Paul, "*We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life*" [Rom. 6:4].

Therefore, it makes all the sense in the world that the Church has chosen the Easter Vigil as the primary celebration of baptism in the Church. Today is a day of great rejoicing for our Neophytes, those who joined the Church last night, for us as individuals, and for our parish community. Today our Neophytes are rejoicing because they received the new life of baptism, became part of the family of God, received the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist for the first time, and were empowered and commissioned to share their new life and faith with others.

As a community, we are rejoicing because God has blessed us with so many new members of our family, especially so many young members of our Christian family. Seven of our eleven new members are in high school or grade school. However, if we entered into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during this Lenten season, we are also rejoicing because we are also celebrating our own resurrection to a richer, fuller life as well. Jesus died and rose so that we might have life and have it to the full. As Matthew Kelly argues in *Resisting Happiness*, we are happiest when we are fully alive, and we are most fully alive when we are striving to become the-best-version-of-ourselves.

Celebrating Jesus' resurrection, we celebrate hope, our founded conviction that God will fulfill his promises. The life Jesus won for us by his death and resurrection is not a life limited to this world. It is life for eternity. Two Sundays ago, we heard Jesus' words to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die*" [Jn. 11:27]. Just as Jesus will never die again, so also we will never die. Our bodies will certainly die, but we will not die. We believe that after our bodies die, we will live in heaven until Christ returns in glory, and then our bodies will rise, and we will live forever in God's kingdom, "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace."

My brothers and sisters, if Jesus became a life-giving Spirit, we are also called to be life giving. As human persons we are only fully alive if we experience love. Like Jesus, we have the power to be life-giving spirits calling people from death to life by loving them as Jesus loved us, i.e., by being self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing.

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