

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.

Easter is the most important feast of the Church year. Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his triumph over sin, suffering, sickness, and death. Today we celebrate the victory of life over death. Today, therefore, we are surrounded by symbols of life: light, water, flowers, beautiful music, and lots of color.

Belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is at the core of our Christian faith. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve*" [1 Cor. 15:3-5]. Today's Gospel provides one basis for our belief in Jesus' resurrection—the empty tomb. A second basis for our belief in Jesus' resurrection was his many post-resurrection appearances.

In the Gospel for the 5th Sunday of Lent, Jesus said, "*...unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit*" [Jn. 12:24]. These words remind us that on Easter Christ did not just rise to new life, but he also became a life-giving Spirit.

Scripture scholar Fr. Marcian Strange once said that Jesus' power to work miracles was not a special power separate from his love. His divine-human love healed the sick, forgave sinners, healed the brokenhearted, expelled demons, and raised the dead to life. It is Jesus' divine-human love for us that is life giving, a divine-human love that was revealed in the gift of the Eucharist, in his death and resurrection, and in his sending the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was put to death because he lived and preached love as the only ultimately decisive reality. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection was also the triumph of love over selfishness and sin for him as well as for us. If during Lent we have died to selfishness and sin through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, today we celebrate not only Jesus' historical resurrection but also our own resurrection to new life in Christ. Today we celebrate our transformation into the likeness of the Risen Christ, into the-best-version-of-ourselves. However, if we have risen with Christ today, we are also called to become life giving to others. We can only be life giving by living lives of love for and service to others.

My brothers and sisters, the Church's primary celebration of Easter is the Easter Vigil. Last night our five Elect, our former Catechumens and Candidates, now our Neophytes, were fully initiated into the Catholic Church through baptism or profession of faith, confirmation, and first Eucharist. Also, two Catholics completed their initiation into the Church through confirmation. Their journey of faith has led them here, and we have been part of their journey. Today, then, we welcome them, we pray with and for them, we promise them our continued love and support, and we invite them to join us in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus' resurrection to others by their words, by the testimony of their lives, and by the power of their love.

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