

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 joyful Easter. In a special way, we want to welcome all who have returned home to Little Flower for Easter and all of our visitors.

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.

However, what today's celebration means for us personally depends on the extent to which we entered into the spirit of Lent. If during Lent we 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.

We can only imagine the feelings of the women as they came to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. Like the Apostles, "their faith had been utterly shaken, everything seemed over, all their certainties had crumbled and their hopes had died."¹ However, inside the empty tomb, the angel proclaimed to them the Good News of Jesus' resurrection: "'Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.'" Scripture scholars suggest that when the angel told the women not to be amazed, he was telling them not to be afraid.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we read that Jesus, by his death, has "set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by fear of death" [2:15; NJB, 1966]. We all have our fears. Fear is part of the human condition. Some of our fears are based on what is going in the world around us. Some of our fears originate within us: "the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of pain, and the fear of death."² Ultimately, all of our fears are rooted in our fear of death. We all know how paralyzing fear can be. Jesus' resurrection, his triumph over sin, suffering, sickness, and death, gives us the strength and courage to overcome or at least manage our fears.

Pope Francis sets an excellent example for us of overcoming or managing fears. Despite death threats, without fear for his safety, he plunges into crowds. In a recent interview, he was asked if the death threats frighten him. He responded, "Look, life is in the hands of God. I told the Lord: take care of me, but if your plan is that I die or that they do something to me, I ask you only one favor: that they do not hurt me. Because I am a big coward when it comes to physical pain."³

My brothers and sisters, the Church's primary celebration of Easter is the Easter Vigil. Last night our seven 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, four 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: "Do not be afraid! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised."

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¹Homily of Pope Francis, Vatican Basilica, Holy Saturday, 19 April 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140419_omelia-veglia-pasquale.html.

²Don Kimball, *Power & Presence: A Theology of Relationships*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), p. 76.

³Elise Harris, "Pope Francis talks ISIS, jokes about being a 'coward' when it comes to physical pain," Catholic News Service, Rome, Italy, Mar 10, 2015 / 07:45 am, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-talks-isis-jokes-about-being-a-coward-when-it-comes-to-pain-41300/>.