

*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 are surrounded by symbols of life. Spring is the season of new life. The days are longer and warmer, the sun shines more brightly, and flowers, trees, and grasses bloom. Likewise, our church is filled with symbols of life: the Easter candle, symbol of Christ risen, alive, and present; the baptismal water, symbol of the church, symbol of the new life of baptism; the beautiful flowers, especially the Easter lilies; the life-giving energy of our music; and the beautiful and colorful decorations.

Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his passage from death to life, and our own resurrection to new life in Him. As he had promised, on the third day after his death, Jesus rose glorious and triumphant. Rising from the dead, he overcame sin, suffering, sickness, and death and became, in the words of St. Paul, "*a life-giving Spirit*" [I Cor. 15:45].

As Christians, we believe that the primary effect of sin is alienation—alienation from God, others, the world, and ourselves. Death, of course, is the ultimate alienation for a human being, the separation of body and soul. If we believe the world, including ourselves, is headed toward death and destruction, we will live our lives in fear—fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of pain, and, ultimately, fear of death. Like sin, fear makes us slaves.

Jesus died and rose "*to free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life*" [Heb. 2:15]. Rising from the dead, Jesus reconciled us with God, others, the world, and ourselves. His resurrection anticipated the new heavens and the new earth and the resurrection of the body. No longer was all creation headed toward death and destruction but toward renewal and life. We are part of this redeemed creation. Jesus' resurrection, then, is a sign or sacrament of hope for us in a world that often seems to be without hope.

The Catholic Church is a sacramental Church. We celebrate our faith sacramentally. During the Easter Vigil, we celebrate the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. Last night our Elect, our former catechumens, candidates, and *confirmandi*, received the sacraments of initiation and, therefore, became fully initiated members of our Christian family.

As St. Paul wrote, "*...we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his 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.6:3-4]. Jesus promised his disciples, "*But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses*" [Acts 1:8]. Confirmation empowers us to be his witnesses. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day*" [6:53-54]. Likewise, Paul wrote, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*" [1 Cor. 11:26].

My brothers and sisters, as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, it is important that we understand what we are celebrating. Jesus' resurrection was not just a religious or a spiritual event. Rather, it was an historical and cosmic event that changed the world forever and, therefore, changed human history. Through the sacraments, we bridge the gap in space and time between ourselves and the great events of salvation and share in the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising.

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