

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
EASTER SUNDAY
MARCH 27, 2005

Msgr. LeFevre and my dear Parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, and Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.”

It is often said that Christmas is for children and Easter, for adults. Actually, Easter is for all of us... of every age... children can enjoy the surprise and enter into the drama of the mystery, while adults appreciate the blessing of new life and the promise of life eternal. The older we get, the more meaningful Easter becomes... we have more and more loved ones now sharing in Christ's Resurrection and we know our own day of death-resurrection draws ever-nearer.

Having just celebrated my 75th birthday, I grow daily more conscious of the brevity and frailty of life in this world. From our first breath, we are hungering and longing for something more, something which will last forever, something which God alone can give. And that “something” is life eternal, full and lasting communion with God and one another *in, with, and through* Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is God the Father's permanent and abiding response of consolation and peace to all the longings of our human hearts. Christ's victory and new life proclaims that death and suffering will not have the last word. The mystery we celebrate this morning invites us to believe that what happened to Christ two thousand years ago has an enduring effect on all humankind; it changes the way we look at death and the way we look at life.

Easter faith celebrates the power of love which has conquered the forces of evil and hatred, sin and death. Those who have lost a loved one know full well that love does not end when a person leaves this world for love cannot be confined by limitations of time or distance. If such is true of *human* love, how much more is it true of *God's* love! As St. Augustine once wrote, *“Give me a lover and that person will understand the resurrection.”*

We gather here today because we believe in the power of God the Father's love for His only Son, a love that raised Him from the dead. We also believe that in raising His Son, the Father was foreshadowing His desire to bring forth a whole new creation. But all of this is *God's* doing, not ours. The victory of Christ, our salvation from sin and death, and the promise of life eternal are all gifts of God, available for those humble enough and patient enough to ask for them and wait for them.

Consider today's Gospel. Mary Magdalen arrived at the tomb while it was still dark and discovered that the large burial stone had been removed. From our perspective of two thousand years of faith, we know all this happened by God's action and without any human intervention. But that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalen and Peter did not know what to make of their discovery. For them, it was a mystery or puzzle to solve: had someone stolen the Lord's body? By contrast, the Beloved Disciple entered the tomb, saw, *and believed*. In other words, faith in the Resurrection requires a willingness to *enter into the mystery* and not try to "solve" it by human logic.

For the Beloved Disciple, an empty tomb made sense because Christ was now present *everywhere*, no longer confined by earthly wrappings. For Mary Magdalen and Peter, the tomb was initially something of a stumbling block, a question to solve; for the Beloved Disciple, however, it was a space open to receive, a sign and pledge of love. The empty tomb makes sense only when we set aside human logic and allow love to overwhelm us.

The faith of the Beloved Disciple is an invitation and model for all of us: only by entering the empty tomb can we discover the surprising gift and joy of Christ's risen presence. The "empty tomb" in our lives today may be many things: sitting patiently in quiet prayer; being a loving spouse or child; listening to a loved one in pain. Perhaps our "empty tomb" at this time in life means facing health issues, anxieties about our employment, or even disappointment and frustration with the Church. Whatever it may be, each of us has an "empty tomb" that can become a sacred space for meeting the Lord.

While Easter provides us a story that is exciting and full of potential, it also forces us to make a decision: will we run to the tomb or away from the tomb? Would someone watching our life and activities be able to tell that we believed in the Resurrection? Is our faith in the Resurrection strong enough to cast out our fears and pride, allowing the Lord to surprise us and love us *as He wishes*? Easter is for adults

who still retain a child-like trust, the ability to wonder, and a willingness to risk everything for the sake of love.

Easter celebrates a transformation that happened in the earthly body of Jesus. It also marks the beginning of a transformation which happened in the minds and hearts of the disciples, a transformation which can and should also happen within us. Consider Peter. Just a few days ago, we heard Peter openly denying the Lord, and now in Acts 10 we hear him boldly proclaiming Jesus as the Christ to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family. The power of the Holy Spirit had transformed Peter—from the inside out. Love had cast out his fear. The Spirit had left no room within him for self-defense or self-consciousness. He had become a transformed person, on fire with love.

We are invited to cooperate with the transforming grace of God in our own life experiences as well—hence, today’s second reading from First Corinthians. St. Paul uses the image of leaven or yeast. Most of us think of yeast as a good thing, the hidden ingredient that makes bread rise. But in the Jewish tradition, the mysterious power of leaven made them somewhat fearful or suspicious of it; they thought of leaven or yeast as something that would corrupt or spoil things.

At the time of the Passover and their flight from Egypt, the Jewish people did not have time to let bread rise; they had to eat unleavened bread. Each year, in preparation for another Passover, faithful Jews carefully swept their houses clean of the old leaven and baked only unleavened bread. And so it is, that Paul challenges the Corinthians—and all of us—to get rid of any “old yeast” of corruption and wickedness still present in our hearts. We are to become *“unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”* In other words, the power of Christ’s Resurrection needs to literally “burst forth” in our minds and hearts, casting out the old way of thinking, allowing His Spirit to completely permeate our minds and hearts.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the homily, having just celebrated a milestone birthday, I have been a bit nostalgic and the Holy Week services this year take on a special poignancy and sensitivity. My mind and heart take me back to my native Pennsylvania. In particular, I was thinking about the highways of the Keystone State. Driving in the Pittsburgh area constantly takes you up and down high, rolling hills. While at times the hills can be a challenge, ultimately, they are a great blessing. After a long, slow climb to the top, you are blessed with a great vista of still other hills and valleys ahead, a panoramic landscape of woods and lakes, little towns and farms.

I close today's homily offering you that image and vision: together, we have climbed the hill of Calvary. We have endured the sorrow of the dark valley of Holy Saturday, waiting to meet the Risen Lord and climb with Him up to ever new heights. On this day "the Lord has made," we look back over our journey thus far; from the horizon of Easter we can see all our joys and sorrows healed and reconciled, transformed into something new and beautiful. And, looking to the far horizon ahead of us, we see still more peaks and valleys with their unknown gifts and possibilities. We know and believe that beyond all the empty tombs of this life, there is a lasting, all-encompassing horizon of life eternal. One day—beyond this world—we will all be united with the Lord... the living and the dead... adults and children... celebrating an Easter that will never end.

Until that day, let us continue together on the ups and downs of our Passover journey, confident that the power of the Resurrection is slowly unfolding *in* us and *through* us. To Jesus Christ our Risen Lord, be glory, honor, power, and praise, now and forever. Amen. Alleluia.