

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
EASTER SUNDAY MORNING
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
MARCH 23, 2008

My brother Priests and Deacons, Religious and Lay Faithful, especially Parishioners of the cluster of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral:

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

On this Easter morning, in union with the whole Church throughout the world, we celebrate the most important event that ever occurred in human history – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Easter Sunday truly is “the day the Lord has made,” for we celebrate a mystery of faith which goes beyond human imagination or explanation.

Christ's Resurrection from the dead was not simply the return to life of someone who had died and was buried; rather, His Resurrection inaugurates a whole new creation, a new way of living, thinking, and acting. His Resurrection also has a great deal to say about our own future life. What happened to the Lord Jesus is the rock of our faith and gives us hope and confidence for our own future resurrection as well.

As a way of contemplating this beautiful Easter mystery, I would like to focus on the word “**identity.**” Our identity is very important to us; the one thing

we would never want to lose is our name and our good reputation. Sadly, some of our brothers and sisters live in fear of revealing their human identity, their names and their history. We can often fail to appreciate how precious our identity is! One of the tragedies of life is when people not only lose their memory but even forget their identity, their own name.

This morning, we proclaim that we share one common identity as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, brothers and sisters of the Risen Lord Jesus. On this day, we celebrate how we have begun to share Christ's Resurrection through the waters of Baptism when we were given a new identity, destiny, and mission as members of God's beloved family.

For many people in the world, identity is something one must fight for, something that must be earned, often through a competitive process. To most of the world, identity emerges by way of contrast; I develop unique skills and gifts which set me apart from others. In our Western culture, we often affirm our own unique identity by declaring our difference from others.

By contrast, this day, we celebrate our common identity as sons and daughters of the Lord, a gift that we did not deserve or merit, a gift that we discover as we forget ourselves and let ourselves be immersed into the mystery of Christ's dying and rising, something which we celebrate in all the sacraments, particularly Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

Before our Baptism or redemption in Christ, we lived in the isolation of sin. Thanks to our sharing in Christ's Death-Resurrection through Christian initiation, we have been claimed for membership in God's family of faith. Before Baptism, our vocabulary used the pronoun "I" and, now, thanks to Baptism, we prefer the first person plural pronoun – "we."

Our Lenten journey has challenged us to die to ourselves, to lose ourselves so that we might be found together in Christ. Just as Christ was transformed through the process of His own suffering, death, and burial, so, too, for us. As we lose ourselves in Him and with Him and for Him, we also are transformed or born again. Here is the paradox of the Christian life: as Christ allowed His divine identity to be hidden in His suffering and dying, that same divine identity became all the more manifest and radiant. The same is true for us: the more we deny our selfish agendas, fears, and preoccupations, the more God will shine through us. As we freely set aside our own human identity, our Christian identity emerges all the more clearly.

We celebrate this day a mystery of faith – not just a past event but something that continues to bear fruit today. Our "alleluia" is not simply a joyful praise for Christ's accomplishment in the past; our alleluia this day, and every day, also looks to the future, proclaiming the beginning of the new creation, the new horizon of the

Kingdom. Easter is the threshold, or dawning, of the new creation and our sharing in Christ's victory.

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of the three disciples who made their way to the empty tomb. It is significant that Mary Magdalen, who first discovered the empty tomb, needed the support and insight of Peter and the other disciple, the Beloved Disciple. For their part, Peter and the Beloved Disciple would have remained in the dark had not Mary Magdalen brought them the startling but puzzling news of the empty tomb. Each of them had a particular and unique relationship with the Lord during His earthly life, and now, they complemented each other as they were sharing together in a common discovery of His risen presence. Their "old" identities no longer mattered; Jesus was risen, and so, they needed to discover – together – a new identity with Him and each other.

No one of us all on our own could possibly appreciate the full depth and meaning of the Easter proclamation. We inspire and motivate each other to come to our new shared identity as "Christians." Consider how Peter, in today's first reading from Acts 10, was challenged by the witness of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, and his family. Peter began to understand that God was sending His Spirit even beyond the confines of the Jewish covenant. But that insight did not come to him automatically; Cornelius' request for Baptism helped Peter stretch to a new level of understanding.

As we gather this day, our Easter faith is made stronger and more vibrant by the decision of thousands of people throughout the world who have chosen – often as mature adults – to be baptized into the Death-Resurrection of Jesus Christ and to join His Risen Body, the Church. We rejoice in their choice to set aside their “old” or former identity and embrace their new life with us in Christ. For their part, our newest members rightly look to us for prayerful support, wisdom, and encouragement. The Easter readings continually reinforce this beautiful theme of witness or testimony – the challenge of pointing others in the direction of the Lord Jesus.

In our world today, as I said earlier, we are often preoccupied with our own personal status or identity, our reputation. We worry about being recognized and having our name remembered for years to come. In today’s second reading, as St. Paul writes to the Colossians, he challenges us to remember, *“You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.”*

Our truest and deepest identity emerges as we choose to be hidden with Christ. The Resurrection was truly a mystery, something that cannot easily be seen or understood by externals. Even if hidden, mysteries are still real and powerful. A mystery is something we must enter into, something which we allow to seize us and draw us into it. Our identity as Christians is a mystery: we take His name and

we hand over to Him our gifts and talents, our hopes and dreams. At Easter, something of our own selfish ego is buried so that we can rise out of the tomb of our selfishness, with a new identity, open and grateful to God, sensitive and compassionate toward one another.

In just a few moments, we will be declaring our Easter faith, our Baptismal promises, our true identity in Christ. Three times we will reject the devil and his temptations, and three times we will affirm our belief in God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In proclaiming our confident faith that Christ rose from the dead, we will also be affirming our hope for our own resurrection from the dead and the renewal of all creation in life eternal.

Our identity as sons and daughters of God continues to come to light in ever new ways as we try to make each day of our lives a day of Easter joy, a day of resurrection. Indeed, we can sing our “alleluia” always and everywhere – throughout our life in this world and forever, together, in the Lord’s Kingdom with all the saints and our departed loved ones. Yes, let us rejoice and be glad, in our new identity. This is, indeed, the day the Lord has made! Amen. Alleluia!