

Easter is not only a story to be told but a signpost on the way of life

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Cathedral of St. Mary
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“Christ is risen, yes He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” From the earliest days of the Church, this acclamation has been proclaimed, an acclamation of joy, and amazement, and hope. Jesus, who died a bloody, brutal death on Good Friday, who seemed to have been taken from his followers, never to be seen again, has returned. But he has not just returned as he was, with a body that could and would die once again. No, Jesus has come back to us in glory, risen in the divine life of God, and now he would never die again. As Pope Francis has said, “He does not simply return to life, rather he is life itself!”

Last night in this darkened church, a single candle was brought forward, up the main aisle. And from that candle, other candles were lit until the entire church was filled with a beautiful glowing light. That Easter candle, which burns here before us in the full light of day, is a reminder to us of the light which pierced the darkness of that first Easter morning. It is a symbol of the brilliant light that emerged from the tomb while the world was still dark and asleep. When all had seemed dark and hopeless, Jesus burst forth from the tomb alive once again, a light that illuminates and makes all things new, a living light that even the sunrise could not rival. He is life itself, which shatters death and brings life to each one of us. Just like the women on that first Easter morning, who came to the tomb when the darkness was lifting and dawn was just about to break, we have come this morning to peer into an empty tomb and to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, the One who conquered sin and death, the One who gave hope to a fallen and sinful world.

In the earliest days of the Church, Easter was a time for the celebration of baptism, which is rightly called the Easter sacrament. After their preparation and the special forty days of Lent, the catechumens were led in, they made their profession of faith, and they were immersed in the waters of baptism. Just as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea and came through to a new life, Jesus went down to death and rose victorious to the life of glory. Now we share in that dying and rising through baptism, by going down into the waters and dying to our old lives, but then rising into the new and eternal life of the Risen Christ. Baptism truly incorporates us into the death and resurrection of Jesus; we become one with him in the great Paschal Mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection.

How blessed we are to continue that ancient tradition of baptism at Easter. In the glow of resurrection light, we not only welcome the newly baptized into the Church, our family of faith, but we also celebrate our own baptisms too. In a few moments, as our Easter profession of faith, all here who have been baptized will be invited to renew the baptismal promises that we once made, and we will be blessed by the Easter water to recall our own baptisms. And as we renew

those promises, let us remember that Christ has died as we must, but he is now Risen, and we too shall rise if we remain faithful to him.

And then, finally, all of us together will participate in another Easter sacrament - the Holy Eucharist. For in the Eucharist we receive “a pledge of future glory.” In the Eucharist we receive Christ who died and is now risen. In the Eucharist, we receive the Christ who promised: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Our presence here for Mass on Easter morning is, as always, a participation in the very life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And our Holy Communion today puts us there at the cross, where Jesus gave his life, but also there at the empty tomb, where he took up his life again.

If we could sum up our entire faith in one celebration, this Easter Sunday would be it. It is called the Feast of all feasts, the highest of all solemnities. This celebration of Christ’s resurrection is the keystone of our faith, and somehow it should change us and transform us. In the forty days of Lent, we have experienced a time of conversion and purification, and now we reach the highpoint, the culmination of that journey. Hopefully, our gains during that season will not be quickly lost, but will endure with the joy of our Lord’s victory.

The celebration of Easter is not only a time to think again about the empty tomb and the message of the angels. It isn’t only a recalling of the surprised women or the dumbfounded disciples. It is also a time to think of our own relationship with our risen Lord, who shares his very life with us. If the world around us sometimes seems hopeless and without meaning, then the knowledge of our Lord’s resurrection should fill us with hope and vigor. If earthly life can seem at times futile and aimless, then through the resurrection we now know where we are going and what our lives must be about. On this Easter day, I can be more certain than ever that sin cannot defeat me because Christ has defeated sin. And on this holy morn, I can be more convinced than ever that death will not have the last word, because Christ has conquered death.

Easter is not only a story to be told, but a signpost on the way of life. It is not just an account of a miracle that happened a very long time ago. It is the breakthrough which has determined the meaning of each of our lives, indeed the meaning of all history. If we grasp this, we too can proclaim the Easter greeting with unbridled joy: “The Lord has risen, yes, he is risen indeed,” and we are now risen with him. On this day of all days, we can say with St. Augustine, “We are a resurrection people, and Alleluia is our song.”