

Easter 2020: Celebrating Faith and Hope

Acts 10:34a,37-43; Ps. 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Col. 3:1-4

Dear families and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Happy Easter! The Lord has risen, alleluia!

Our Easter celebration at this time is very unusual. We are a community separated, quarantined, and have to stay-at-home due to the horror of the pandemic. You and I are forced by this painful reality to worship by watching the live streaming of the Mass. It may be a new way of being a worshipping community due to our extra-ordinary circumstance, but this is not a standard form of worship.

This unusual and extra-ordinary circumstance rocked the boat of our family and community life. Some of us may ask on how do we make sense to celebrate Easter with joy when we know there are families whose love ones suffered and are still in ICU? How do we make sense of our worship amid more than one million deaths all over the world caused by the deadly virus? Even our singing of alleluia won't bring them back to life. Is there reason to be joyful when we know that many of our brothers and sisters were laid off from their jobs, and some might even lose the prospect of getting the same work? Or does our liturgical singing of alleluia lighten the painful realities of people who suffered betrayal, abuse, violence, injustice, inhuman treatment, those in refugee camps, and the list can go on and on?

Our answer is YES. There is a reason to celebrate. Easter is the heart of our Christian life - "If Christ has not risen, then our belief is in vain" (1Cor. 15:14). We are celebrating our faith and hope!

Our celebration of Easter is not to numb us from the sad realities around us. Our worship does not ignore nor deny that we worry about many things - about our families, children, jobs, and our future after this deadly pandemic. We are celebrating Easter because we would like to offer all the pains and sufferings to the Lord. Jesus is no stranger to suffering. Though he is without sin, he suffered a violent death for our sake. He freely offered himself a sacrifice for all, and now he has risen. The passage of the Gospel of John 20:1-9 tells us that he is no longer in the tomb where his bruised and battered body rested. It was Mary Magdala who found it, then Peter and John. Jesus is no longer in the grave, a place of darkness and lifelessness. He has risen from the dead, he appeared to his disciples, spoke to them and comforted them. He forgave and empowered them and promised, "I will be with you until the end of times." His resurrection made them courageous and joyful witnesses. We heard Peter's testimony saying, "the Lord commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead... that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:42-43).

Easter calls us to celebrate the fact that the light of Christ has come into our world, providing us hope amid the darkness of our times. The transformed disciples who courageously proclaimed the risen Christ and the conversion of the many people are testaments of the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit that continues in our times.

While the pandemic causes havoc to our life, it also creates an attitude of attentiveness to our families, cares to the vulnerable, unity, solidarity, and support with one another, both local and global. We now hear the words that repeatedly said, "we are all in this together." It awakens us to the beauty and dignity of life — that people matter over the economy, that the safety and well-being of a human person are paramount importance over financial or personal gain. These are some of what our Lord Jesus cared about. We thank God for these remarkable and honorable actions.

Our faith teaches us that Jesus is always where love is felt, where attention to the vulnerable is given, where the dignity of the human person is protected, where sins are forgiven. He is always present wherever people embrace his teachings, his mission, and his life.

Easter is our celebration of past saving actions of Jesus and the transforming power of his risen life here and now. It challenges us to share a kind of living that goes beyond the expectation of this world. This is possible when we change our sinful ways by rising above the things that made us indifferent and self-absorbed and become people of the resurrection. St. Paul reminds us, "think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-4). This invites us to renew our relationship with the risen Christ. It is a relationship that no one can ever take away from us. It will fill us with renewed hope. What happened to Mary of Magdala, Peter, John and the rest of the disciples who experienced incredible transformation and came to know new life powered by the Holy Spirit, can happen to each one of us.

Let us build up this renewed relationship with the Lord through reading the Bible and living it, developing a personal prayer life, always uniting ourselves with the holy sacrifice of Jesus in the Mass, living a life of creative charity, and we will find ourselves in his saving grace. We may not see that all our problems will suddenly vanish, but we will find renewed hope, strength, and courage to walk through the storm of life.

Happy Easter!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor
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