

Easter Sunday – April 12, 2020 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 9:00am Livestreamed Mass (COVID-19) – 850 words

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad”. A very happy Easter morning to you all! I make the words of Mary Magdalene from the Paschal Sequence my own: “Yes, Christ my hope is arisen; to Galilee he goes before you.” Christ still goes before us today, even in a time like the present. Life has so greatly changed – this is an Easter like none other. But he is with us; he leads us.

It is painful for us not to be gathered here together this year – especially, to receive our Risen Lord in the Holy Eucharist. It is sad that we cannot enjoy watching the children of the parish hunt for Easter Eggs after Mass. Normally, we would be dressed in our Easter finery; our church would be even more beautifully decorated; and we would enjoy singing the Easter chants and hymns. So how can I wish you a Happy Easter?

Pope Francis spoke to this in his Easter Vigil homily last night, from an empty St. Peter’s Basilica. He was talking about how the women who went to the tomb with the burial spices and found it empty, were greeted by the angels with the words, “Do not be afraid” – a message of hope. The Holy Father said that from this,

...we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: *the right to hope*. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. No! It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, “All will be well”, clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus’ hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.

The grave is the place where no one who enters ever leaves. But Jesus emerged for us; he rose for us, to bring life where there was death, to begin a new story in the very place where a stone had been placed. He, who rolled away the stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb, can also remove the stones in our hearts. So, let us not give in to resignation; let us not place a stone before hope. We can and must hope, because God is faithful. He did not abandon us; he visited us and entered into our situations of pain, anguish and death. His light dispelled the darkness of the tomb: today he wants that light to penetrate even to the darkest corners of our lives. Dear sister, dear brother, even if in your heart you have buried hope, do not give up: God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!¹

Yes, Christ still goes before us. This Easter, we are challenged in a new way to “see and believe”, as Saints Peter and John were in the gospel we just heard. Jesus had pre-announced his suffering, death, and resurrection, but until that point no one had ever been risen from the dead, never to die again. It took a while for them to understand – but they had the gift of faith. Faith always seeks to understand.

¹ Homily of Pope Francis for the Easter Vigil, 2020:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200411_omelia-vegliapasquale.html.

I said in my homily last night that this pandemic is a gift. Our Lord is waking us up. He is shining his light in. He is asking us to re-focus and re-commit. We receive this trial as the discipline he gives to those whom he loves – as a father disciplines a son.² But can we fully see the way forward? Do we fully understand? No; of course not. No matter – Christ goes before us. We must follow his lead. There is hope.

And so, if you are disillusioned, lonely, fearful, or just annoyed this Easter, I ask you to make an act of faith, an act of hope, and an act of love. If you type into Google, “act of faith hope and love”, the very first results that come up will be Catholic web sites with those traditional prayers. John in the gospel “saw and believed” – but he and Peter “did not yet understand”. So it may well be for us.

“God is able to make everything work unto good”, the Holy Father said. “Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ”, St. Paul, our patron, said.³ My prayer, as I celebrate this Easter Mass physically separated from you, is that we may all be renewed in hope this Easter and perceive that our Lord truly goes before us. Let us follow his lead with faith, hope, and love. And someday, we will more fully understand.

Again, a very happy Easter to you all!

² See Hebrews 12:6-7.

³ See Romans 8:39.