

Easter 2018

The discovery made on that first Easter Sunday morning was most disconcerting to the first witnesses. Mary of Magdala had come to the tomb very early in the morning only to see that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. She was shocked beyond belief and ran to Peter to tell him: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Mary is in the throes of grief and badly shaken by the death of Jesus and now by the stone being rolled away from the tomb. Where were "they"? We are given no clue as to who the "they" were that she was thinking of. It would take some time before the empty tomb could be seen as part of the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead.

In Luke's Gospel the women who come to the tomb encounter two men dressed in white robes. The women are frightened. They hold their heads down. We may wonder, were they men or were they angels? Do they represent those who will be baptized? They address the women saying, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here. He is risen" [Lk. 24, 5]. This is precisely what the newly baptized adults would tell us. They would tell us that they have come to faith in a living Jesus. And they would call each of us to faith in a living Jesus, a Jesus who is more gloriously alive than when he walked upon this earth.

Sometimes people look for life in all the wrong places. Real life can be found in Christ alone. Remember what Jesus said when he came to the tomb where the dead Lazarus had been laid to rest. He said, "Take the stone away." Then he called Lazarus to come forth from the tomb. Jesus wants whatever is blocking us from living life to the full to be removed. He wants to free us from all the wrappings that make us cling to death.

Jesus wants to awaken us to the realization that he alone can give us life, that apart from him we have no life. The late St. Pope John Paul II reminded us that only in Christ can men and women find answers to the ultimate questions that trouble them. In his visit to Poland in 1979 he said "Man is incapable of fully understanding himself apart from Christ" [Victory Square, Warsaw, June 2, 1979].

Easter is not only about the resurrection of Jesus. It is also about the stirring and rising of faith in the hearts of all who want to understand the meaning of their lives on earth and their ultimate destiny. Easter is about faith, faith not only in the Jesus who gave himself on the cross because he loved us, but also faith in a living Jesus who loves us now and calls us to the fullness of life.

St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." This means being fully alive to our own gifts and talents! It means being alive to those around you, and especially to the members of our own family, but also to the wider world and especially to the poor. It means being fully alive to the God who is love, who created us to know, love and serve him and hopefully one day to see him face to face in eternal life. "The glory of a human being," Irenaeus said, "is the vision of God."

Speaking to young people recently, Pope Francis said it is time to break free from fear, fake online personas and looking at the world through a digital screen. "Do not allow the spark of youth to be extinguished in the darkness of a closed room in which the only window to the world is a computer and a smartphone. Open wide the doors of your life! May your time and space be filled with meaningful relationships, real people with whom to share your authentic and concrete experience of daily life" [February 12, 2018].

Open wide your heart to Jesus. Jesus wants to connect us to the real world!

Francis also challenges each of us with these words: "Please do not water down your faith in Jesus Christ. We dilute fruit drinks- orange, apple or banana juice- but please do not drink a diluted form of faith. Faith is whole and entire, not something that you water down.... [He adds] I want the Church to go out onto the streets. I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves" [World Youth Day, July 25, 2013]. This, dear friends, is essentially the challenge of this Easter Day!!

The Bible says, "Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you" [Eph. 5, 14]. So Rise and shine. Wake up! Take the message of Easter to heart. Jesus offers you and me life, not only in a future resurrection of the body, but life now. Jesus is not only the resurrection at the end. He wants to be the resurrection and the life in your life right now. He wants to awaken you to a faith that is alive.

In this increasingly secularized world, we need to grow our faith and actively live it if we are not to lose it. Many today have lost their way.

Do not live a diluted faith, a faith devoid of grace and power. Do not drift away from God. They do allow your life to slip into darkness and despair. If you have done so, return to him. He will heal you. He turns no one away who comes to him.

Allow your faith to grow. Life is not static. The Lord Jesus is alive. He is life itself. Allow him to live in you and to direct you along the path that leads to eternal life. Give your life to Christ and become more deeply engaged with his work and the mission of the church in this world. You have a mission and a purpose in this life. Discover what it is. Desire the things that Christ

so much desires to give to you. Pray. Prayer awakens us to the deepest yearnings of our heart. Pray unceasingly. Pray the words framed by Hugh of St. Victor long ago: O, dear Lord, three things I pray: To know thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly, to follow thee more nearly.

The tomb in which they laid him is empty now. The Lord Jesus is risen from the dead as he said he would. His Spirit has been unleashed into the world. Jesus is close to us now. He is merely a thought and a prayer away.

Good friends, do you have a prayer? What are you seeking from Jesus on this Easter Day?

Father Neil