

This past week, everyone in the world was shocked and saddened by the fires that engulfed the Cathedral Church in Paris, Notre Dame de Paris...Our Lady of Paris Cathedral. Many images are still very vivid, the roof collapsing....the spire tumbling down. However, as the cathedral continued to burn, the faithful gathered outside singing hymns to Our Lady of Paris. In a tragedy like this we can often focus on the negative. People on social media reflected that the fire and the burning of the Church is very symbolic of what the Catholic Church is going through with all the iniquity that is present among the clergy...plagued with scandal and corruption...or that God is angry at his people. But, we should focus on the positive...rather than the negative. While the beauty of the Cathedral is tarnished, the beauty of the Church shines forth in the faithful who lined the streets to pray and to sing hymns to Our Lady.

Today, is a good day to focus on the positive, rather than the negative. Today we celebrate that Our Lord and Saviour who died a terrible and tragic death on the cross, rose from the dead. He is alive, he is not dead. And we have come to this Church, this Easter Sunday morning, to acknowledge this reality and to encounter the risen Lord once again in the many ways that he makes that possible for us.

The first way that He makes it possible for us to encounter Him is through the proclamation of the Scriptures. When we come to Church to encounter the risen Lord, after acknowledging our sins and seeking God's unfathomable divine mercy which He won for us on the cross, we listen to the Word of God in the Scriptures with hearts made pure. You would not remember this, but at your baptism the minister prayed *Ephratha*, be opened...and he touched your ear and your mouth, so that you may be hearers and proclaimers of the Word. And as we allow the Word of God to take root in our hearts, we begin the process of becoming disciples of the risen Lord.

The second way that He makes it possible for us to encounter Him is through the Sacraments. In every Sacrament that we have received, we are encountering the risen Lord. The first of those sacraments that we received was baptism...the *Vita Spiritualis Janua*...the door of the spiritual life. Every time we come to Church to encounter the risen Lord, we bless ourselves with Holy Water...to remind ourselves of what Christ has done for us...by dying, destroyed death and by rising, restoring our life. He has saved us through the waters of baptism...giving us His grace...giving us faith. Today, once again, we commit ourselves through the renewal of our Baptism Promises, to the faith that gives us life. True life. The fullness of life. In committing ourselves to that faith, we are also committing to the mission that Christ has given to us as His disciples.

After committing ourselves once again to the mission of discipleship in spreading the faith that we have been renewed in, we encounter the risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Christ having been raised from the dead has the definitive victory over death and now abides with us in the Eucharist. On earth, this as close as we are going to get to encounter Christ...for He becomes food for us...to consume and digest. From here we are strengthened...relying not on ourselves but on the power of God.

Ultimately, when we come to Church to encounter the risen Lord, we have come to be transformed by God's grace...to rededicate ourselves to the service of others for the glory of God. At the end of Mass we are given the imperative: GO...Go in peace...glorifying the Lord by your life...announcing the Gospel of the Lord... Having encountered the risen Lord in Church, we go forth as inspired witnesses of Christ Our Lord to change the world. Just think, Mary Magdalene...a well known sinner, Peter, and the other disciple... uneducated fishermen were the first to encounter the risen Lord and that is what made them convicted in their witnesses in proclaiming Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead...that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Consider what Our Lord can do with us if we, like Mary Magdalene, Peter and the other disciples, do not focus on the negative...but on the positive. God is not dead...He is alive...and we have come here, to this Church, St. Mary Star of the Sea, to encounter him.