

Easter 2019

On behalf of the clergy and staff and all the faithful Happy Easter to everyone. I hope that you and all you love are full of the joy of this day and its promise that death has no more power over us.

Looking around and seeing the all the flowers, joining in on the triumphant music, I cannot help but think of the events of this past week and the people of Paris. The images in the media show people in the crowd with hands over their mouths and tears streaming down their faces. As the fire spread across the roof, the desperation on the faces intensified. What was in front of them, what we saw in the reports looked hopeless. Even after the flames were extinguished the ruined hulk loomed as a silent witness to disbelief and profound sorrow, people staring at it wondering if it was just a bad dream. Centuries of spiritual solace and the pride of a nation. Always there as a promise that come what may, the strength of what the Cathedral represented would stand forever. What staggering disappointment. The sonorous and familiar voice of Emmanuel, the largest of the bells did not call out across Paris last Thursday to beckon the faithful to recall the Last Supper. They did not gather on Friday to kneel before the cross or this Easter Sunday to shout their alleluias. The sun still shines through those intense blue and red stained-glass windows as it has since the 13th century, but no one was there to bath in the brilliant reflections of the saints and angels witnessing the story of salvation. The stone vaulting did not reverberate to the singing of resurrection praises. The great organ, with its thousands of voices, silenced. It did not shatter the darkness with thunder like the rolling away of a giant stone.

While the fire may have burned much of the yesterdays, it had no power over the tomorrows. The people of God know that they live in an Easter world and not a Good Friday world. Ashes will give way to new wood and fresh beginnings. The outpouring of pledges has been unprecedented. The church will be rebuilt.

I'm reminded of the great fire of London in 1666 that left St. Paul's Cathedral a heap of stones, ashes and molten lead. Much of London was devastated but according to Samuel Pepys's diary, the people were especially drawn to the great smoldering pile that had towered over the great city for centuries. The symbol of the power of faith and civic pride. So sure, they were of its ability to withstand any onslaught, they brought their belongings there to be protected. Booksellers stacked their inventory in the crypt chapel. Surely that edifice that survived the predation of the extremists during the Reformation would not submit to a conflagration. So, there they stood, their hands over their mouths in disbelief. Watching their 11th century cathedral tumble down taking with it all the yesterdays... but not the tomorrows. Because they lived in an Easter world not a Good Friday world. The people of London resolved to build again. A new Cathedral rose from the ashes and on the cornerstone was carved the word "Resurgam;" I shall rise again. The church was rebuilt.

The faithful here at St. Theresa are no strangers to great disappointment, a promise reduced to ashes. Almost twenty years ago, this building we sit in today burned to the ground before it was ever used for worship, the victim of poorly placed oily rags. God's people here were stunned in disbelief. This terrible disappointment did not, however, keep the faithful from celebrating resurrection. Even though stung with grief and bewilderment the parishioners resolved to move forward as they were stirred to action and within two years another building had risen in its place. Perhaps a stone with *resurgam* carved in it should have been placed here as well. Maybe the yesterdays went with the oil rags but the tragedy could not kill the tomorrows.

When something or someone or even an institution is important to us and that something or someone or institution is suddenly and tragically taken from us, or when we have been betrayed and disillusioned by it, it is often hard for us to see past the ruins left in the wake of so much disappointment. This has been true for the church in the past few years in the wake of so many cases of abuse and the epic myopia among the bishops. The faithful who trusted have been betrayed. They, too, have stood outside mourning the ruins. With every report in the media God's people have stood with their hands over their mouths in disbelief.

That must have been something of what those women felt in that garden early on that morning of the first day of the week. They had invested themselves in the promises. They trusted in a possibility that was now gone. Taken away. Killed, dead and buried. They, too, like the Parisians to Notre Dame, like the 17th century Londoners to Ludgate Hill, they had gone there to prove to themselves that the unbelievable *had* happened, that the glorious impressiveness they adored *was* gone. Like parishioners who drove by this campus to see for themselves the twisted girders where once stood the church. Like the disillusion everywhere who have resolved to rebuild rather than abandon, restore rather than resist, give with love instead of hoarding with bitterness.

Because there is good news. Christ is risen.

And with him everything else. Easter does not call for mourning for the crucified Lord or pointing fingers at who may or may not be to blame, but loyalty to the Risen one, the same loyalty that made Peter after Jesus' death ten times the person he was before; The loyalty that made St. Stephen under the rain of death-dealing stones cry out, Christlike, "Father, forgive"; the loyalty of the early martyrs who with their blood watered the seed of the Christian Church until it became the acorn that broke the mighty boulder that was the Roman Empire. Not for nothing has it been written "If there should arise one utterly believing person, the history of the world would be changed." You notice that St. Paul never tries to explain the resurrection. He knows that to explain the ways of God in the light of human experience is like trying to explain the sun in terms of a candle. It's the sun that makes sense of the candle. Likewise, we do not prove the resurrection; the resurrection proves us.

The Easter faith doesn't ask us to believe without proof, but to trust without reservation. Don't think your way into a new life but live your way into an entirely new way of thinking. And what is this new way of thinking we call the Easter Faith? It says that we live in an Easter, not a Good Friday, world. It says that you can kill God's love, but you cannot keep it dead and buried. It says that all the strength and tenderness that on Good Friday we saw scourged and stretched out on a cross, is alive again and said to us "Lo, I am with you always even to close of the age." The resurrection faith says that until all eternity Christ will be alive, now in the form of the Holy Spirit trying by any road, and at any cost, to bring about our own resurrection, for "the glory of God is a human being fully alive."

Happy Easter,

Now let's get busy rebuilding the church.

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