

To be a Christian is to believe in the Resurrection of Christ

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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My brothers and sisters in Christ, Happy Easter! I welcome all of you, and with all my brother priests, deacons, and seminarians, I wish you every blessing on this wonderful day of our Lord's Resurrection.

From the earliest days of the Church, on this bright morning, the faithful would proclaim "Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia!" And throughout the Easter season, they would even greet each other with these same words, because they knew that this is the defining fact of our lives: Christ is risen, he has overcome sin and death, all sin and all death, and he now lives forever.

To be a Christian is to believe in the Resurrection of Christ. We aren't Christians because we believe in sin and suffering. Even the cross of Good Friday doesn't fully explain who we are. We are Christians because we believe in God's mercy upon us sinners, we believe in the joy and liberation of new life, and most importantly, we believe in the Resurrection of our Lord. The heart of our faith is built on this hope that every trial becomes an increase of grace, every sorrow can become joy, and every death can become a resurrection. Some years ago, Pope emeritus Benedict said that "One who has hope, lives differently." And this day of resurrection is the unfailing source of our hope. It is the defining fact of our lives.

Christianity is all about light, joy, and Resurrection. The Christian is one who believes and allows himself to be transformed, renewed, and captured by the One who is risen, Jesus who died but who now lives forever. In a certain way, on Good Friday, each one of us is buried with Christ because of our sins. In fact, we die a little more every time we sin, and our sins are the great stone that is rolled in front of the tomb, our tomb. On our own, we could never budge that stone, we could never escape from that tomb, where the death of sin seems to have the last word.

But all of that changed on that first Easter morning. After dying the death of sin, not his own sins but ours, Jesus was buried in a tomb that was designed for sinners. And yet, he could not be held by that tomb, by the bonds of sin and death. He was able to roll away that stone of sin and death, not only for himself, but for all of us. What we could not do for ourselves, Christ has done for us. And for that reason, Easter is the triumph of God's abundant mercy. Pope Francis tells us, "The Resurrection of the Lord is the culmination of the Gospel, it is the Good News par excellence: Jesus, who was crucified, is risen!"

Easter means that we can rise from the dead, that the promise of resurrection is real, and that it will take place, not only in the distant future but also in the present, right now. We are already risen to new life in Christ, and we are well on our way to the resurrection that Jesus promises those who believe and place their hope in him. But of course there can be no Easter, no resurrection for us unless we are willing to die to ourselves and live a new life, life in Christ, a life of hope, mercy, and joy. The Resurrection must set us on a new course, a course that is aimed toward Christ himself. With our faces toward the empty tomb, toward the beauty of the

Risen Christ, every aspect of our lives must now be directed toward the resurrection we all hope for. If we wish to be one with him in resurrection, then we must be one with him now in life.

Easter is a joyful day for the entire Church, but especially for our catechumens and candidates, who have prepared for many months to receive the sacraments and enter the Church. Last night, at the Easter Vigil, our catechumens were baptized in the newly blessed Easter water, and then with our candidates who had already been baptized, they were confirmed and received the Holy Eucharist for the first time. These new members of our family inspire us and give us great hope, knowing that God continues to call our brothers and sisters to share with us in the fullness of mercy that he grants to his Church. They too have become part of that vast company of the faithful reaching all the way back to the time of the apostles. They join with us and all those early Christians who rejoiced in the Resurrection as they were baptized, who shared in the Lord's Supper, and who were anointed with the gifts of the Spirit. And in a few moments, when we renew our own baptismal promises, we will declare again that God has made us a new creation in Christ, who is risen and has called us into the family of his Church. This renewal is more than a promise to be nice to each other. It is a declaration that I have put behind the old life of sin, and now I live only in Christ. It is an announcement that I no longer belong to the world, but now I belong to Christ.

But now, my friends, we have a job to do. On that first Easter morning, when it was still dark, the women came to the tomb and found that it was empty. They ran to the apostles and told what they had seen and heard. They were the first witnesses of the Resurrection to others. But we need Resurrection witnesses in the present day too. The world around us is pummeled by the curse of death, and sometimes seems to prefer death over life. The world is waiting to see that one can pass through death to life, waiting to see in us that it's possible to die and to rise again. The only face that the risen Jesus now has to show to our contemporaries is our own. So my friends, let the world, with all its sadness and despair, see Resurrection joy in us. May we all experience the joy of new life this Easter. And in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may we be missionaries of mercy, inviting every person we know to encounter the love of God. Just as the women went from the empty tomb amazed and joyful, let us go forth from this church amazed and joyful, ready to give witness to the mercy we have received through new life in Christ.

Our message is simply this: in the resurrection of Jesus, love has triumphed over hatred, mercy has triumphed over sinfulness, goodness over evil, truth over falsehood, and life has conquered death. Because Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia!