

Indeed, he is truly Risen! Alleluia!

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

Apr. 15, 2017

*Easter Vigil
Cathedral of St. Mary
Fargo, ND*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we rejoice with the universal Church and with all the earth. Christ has risen! His radiant light fills the world. The darkness of sin and death has been vanquished forever! It is the most joyful day of the year!

Throughout the solemn days of Holy Week, we were on a spiritual journey, walking with Jesus. We followed him through the gates of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. We were with him in the Upper Room on Holy Thursday, where he gave us the Eucharist, the priesthood, and the example of his humble, loving service. With the apostles, we tried to watch and pray with him during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. And much like them, we drifted off and followed at a distance as he carried his cross to Golgotha, the place of the skull. When he died on that cross, as we witnessed once again on Good Friday, the earth quaked and the veil of the Temple was torn in two. And after he was taken down from the cross, we watched while his mother and friends sorrowfully prepared his body for burial. We kept vigil after the soldiers secured his tomb and closed it with a large stone.

But the story of Jesus does not end there. In the Gospel we just heard, we find Mary Magdalene in the dim light of morning at the tomb, but the stone has been rolled away, and the tomb is empty. She goes to tell the others, and Peter and John run to see for themselves. At first they are confused, but we read that John saw and believed. Matthew's Gospel tells us there is another earthquake, and an angel says to the women at the tomb, "He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." Dear friends, Christ is risen, and the angel's words are meant for us today. Jesus Christ is alive! He is not in the tomb where they laid him. The stone and the chains of death could not hold him. Today, the whole world rejoices in the resurrection, the new creation. Just as night passes to day, so Jesus has passed from death to life, a life that will never end. He has risen from the dead, just as he said he would.

This, my brothers and sisters, is the great truth of our faith. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, our preaching and faith would be in vain, as St. Paul said. But it is true, he has been raised! Christ's resurrection is the proof God provides to assure us that his Gospel and his teachings are true. By raising Jesus from the dead, God shows us that his love is stronger than sin and stronger than death. Because of the resurrection, we can be sure that whoever believes in Christ has eternal life. Because of the resurrection, we can be sure that in baptism we are reborn, that if we eat his flesh and drink his blood, he will raise us up on the last day. The resurrection is not an event from the distant past. The resurrection continues every day to open our lives to eternity, that all men and women might walk in newness of life with renewed hope even in the midst of suffering.

And so, my brothers and sisters, on this Easter morning we pray with new and joyful confidence. Our Lord has overcome the world, and we know now that we can too. As St. Paul tells us in today's second reading, our lives are now hidden, immersed in Christ. We are new creations. We are alive with the new life of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. We abide in God and God abides in us. Now we seek the things that are above, the things of God. We live now by the new law of love that Jesus has revealed to us in his passion and death. What our Lord showed us on Holy Thursday and Good Friday – washing his disciples' feet and enduring his passion and death on the cross – must become the pattern for our lives. As he said and we all remember, "I have given you an example...as I have done for you, you should also do."

We are called to follow Christ, to imitate him. To find our lives in losing them. To love by laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters in self-denial and works of love and mercy. We are called to live our lives with grace and charity, to present our lives as living sacrifices to God, to offer everything we do as a spiritual sacrifice of praise. This is what St. Peter means in today's first reading when he says that we are called to bear witness to Christ in his resurrection. We are called to testify to the difference that his resurrection makes in our lives. Now we are called to love and be loved, to tell the world that Christ has risen, that he has made us children of our Father in heaven. The work of our own resurrection – to be witnesses of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives – is the work of our lifetime. To live in God we must continually set out on the path of dying to sin and death, and living in imitation of Christ, who now lives forever.

In a moment, as we do every Easter, we will renew our baptismal promises. Baptism is the Easter sacrament, the sacrament of new life. In baptism, we are reborn in Christ, we are set free from sin and given a share in Christ's inheritance as the adopted sons and daughters of God. Many of us were very young when we were baptized, so it is entirely appropriate that we should, on this day, remember our baptisms and renew our commitment to Christ in baptism. But these are not idle words, they are words with consequences. By renewing these promises, we proclaim once again that we live in Christ, that we are entirely his. We profess once again our faith in his resurrection and the hope of our resurrection to come. And, we resolve to live our lives here on earth with a view towards eternal life, the life that Jesus won for us upon the cross and that he now offers to us through his resurrection.

My brothers and sisters, our prayer today is a prayer of wonder and awe, joy and hope. This is the new day when light conquers darkness, when grace overcomes sin, when life overwhelms death. This is the day when we rejoice as the Risen Lord stands among us, transcendent in his glory but tangible and near to us in his sacraments. May no one ever take from us the joy of this eternal day. By unshakeable faith, may we come to know ever more deeply by what water we have been cleansed, by whose Spirit we have been reborn, by whose Blood we have been redeemed. And may the Risen Christ be our burning light of love as we go out into the world, with our personal commitment to the Gospel, proclaiming to the people of our times that Christ is risen! Indeed, he is truly Risen! Alleluia!