

***“Let your faith be bigger than your fear”.***

***Easter Sunday 2023***

On this Easter Sunday I want to leave you with this message. Because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:

“Let your faith be bigger than your fear”.

Let me tell you two stories of people for whom fear had dominated their lives but then Easter Sunday happened.

The first is about a working-class man with almost no education. He tried to make something better out of his humble, poor life, by going to work for a friend who was starting a new venture. He was hoping for a new lease on life, but it didn't work out. In fact, his friend was arrested and thrown in prison, wrongly condemned for a crime he didn't commit. In the end, he was brutally killed by a furious mob. The working-class man was not only discouraged by this failure, but he was afraid that the same thing might happen to him. So, he disowned his old friend and, dejected, went back to his former life.

The second story is about a woman of ill repute who had squandered her abundant gifts. She never got respect, and never did anything to deserve any. A slave to her own sin, she cried herself to sleep night after night. She simply couldn't imagine a better life than the one she was living. Then she met someone who gave her hope - the same man from the first story, who was starting a new venture. She also went to work for him, trying to get a new lease on life. But then he was murdered, and her hope was extinguished, like the fragile flame of a candle in the wind. And what happened next?

Well, they found out Jesus rose from the dead - and that made all the difference, for the woman's name is St Mary Magdalene, and the man is St Peter. When they encountered Jesus on Easter Sunday he declared:

*“Mary- Peter let your faith be bigger than your fear”.*

Jesus wants to speak the same word to each one of us today:

*“Let your faith be bigger than your fear”.*

Now the question is faith in whom, faith in what? St Paul is very clear when he says:

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile<sup>1</sup>*

The whom of faith is Jesus Christ, and particularly faith in his resurrection. Christianity is an historical faith. Something happened on that first Easter. A Jewish man who had been crucified three days earlier was raised from the dead. Now please know this. Crucifixion happened all the

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1 Co 15:17). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

time in the Roman World. One hundred years before Good Friday 6000 slaves who tried to revolt against Rome were crucified on a 200 km stretch of road known as the Appian Way. It made the message clear. This was how Rome dealt with threats to their interests. This event as much as any established crucifixion as the symbol of Roman ruthlessness when it came to suppressing their enemies.

That Jesus was crucified, that had been seen before. Understandably as the Bible teaches his followers were dejected, despondent and now cowering with fear because their faith was lost. They were demoralized, looking sad, St Luke tells us.

But then Easter Morning happened. And don't miss this point. In each Gospel story we are told Jesus first appeared to women. Women who had no status, no voice and little value in the First Century. If this story was made up, a fabrication the writers would not have had women as the first witnesses to the events of Easter Sunday. Jesus sends these women back to the men. When they bring the news of the Resurrection what was reaction of the Apostles? St Luke tells us:

*<sup>11</sup> But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them<sup>2</sup>*

St Paul whom I quoted a few minutes ago with a hostile opponent to the Christian movement in the years immediately after the Resurrection. But he came to be convinced that Jesus had been literally raised from the dead and confidently states:

*But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died<sup>3</sup>*

Now this saying of St Paul's moves us from the whom of faith to what of faith. So, what if Jesus was raised from the dead two thousand years ago. What difference does that make to me on April 9, 2023?

This is where the second part of this verse from Saint Paul is so important. Jesus' resurrection is like the first fruits of the larger harvest that is to come. It is a sign for all have died that we will one day share in his resurrected life.

So, this is the first point. Faith in the Resurrected Christ makes all the difference to what we believe to be our destiny. There is a book that Catholics hold to be very dear. It is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It distills the teaching of the Bible in bite size pieces: Listen to what it says about our future sharing in Christ's Resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Lk 24:11). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1 Co 15:20). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

*Christ's Resurrection—and the risen Christ himself—is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"*<sup>4</sup>

Because of Christ's Resurrection the Church teaches the following. When we die, we will face judgment. God's desire is that every human being will share in His eternal life. After death our soul will leave our body, any sin not healed in this life will be healed beyond the grave in purgatory. This is so we will then share in the life of heaven. Then the time will come when there will be the general resurrection, at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Our souls will then be joined to a Resurrected Body that will be like the Resurrected Body Jesus Christ. This is what St Paul means when in our reading from Colossians he stated:

***When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.***<sup>5</sup>

The first what of faith is assurance that God desires our eternal good. But you might be saying I am only twenty, or thirty, or maybe even 13. What does this mean for me now? This is where we turn to the short reading, we had from St Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Here we read the following:

***If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth***<sup>6</sup>

This is what St Paul is stating here. If you know your destiny live your earthly life with heaven's values influencing how we live here below. We are to live in these earthly bodies with an anticipation of what it will be to live in Resurrected bodies. This is why Jesus taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". And this is where the Church comes in to play. For you see we don't just live our faith as individuals making our way through the decades of our earthly life. Now we are to know that these bodies we have now can be joined to the body of the Church. And so, with all of those who know that our life is hidden with Christ, one day to be fully revealed, we are to support each other to live as people whose faith is bigger than our fear. Jesus is with us in His Church and we do not have to face this journey alone.

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<sup>4</sup> Catholic Church. (2000). [\*Catechism of the Catholic Church\*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 171). United States Catholic Conference.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Col 3:4). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Col 3:1–2). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.