

Homily by Adam Cardinal Maida
EASTER MORNING
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
APRIL 8, 2007

(Note: Second Reading is I Corinthians 5:6B-8)

Monsignor LeFevre, Parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral Cluster, and my Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia!”

On this glorious Easter morning, we celebrate our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This event which took place two thousand years ago has abiding significance for us; it gives hope, shape, and meaning to every aspect of our lives. In this sense, Easter is the most important day in our Church calendar; every other celebration depends on, and connects with, this core truth of our lives—that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of the Father, suffered, died, and was raised from the dead. We believe He lives now in glory with His Father and will come again at the end of time.

Our faith in Christ’s Resurrection cannot easily be explained; it is truly a mystery. The whole story of Jesus Christ proclaims that what seems impossible can indeed be possible! First of all, the very fact that God took on human flesh and wanted to live on this earth in a hidden way totally boggles the human mind and imagination. Secondly, we are confounded by the fact that Jesus, though He was divine, suffered and died like the rest of us—and in a way that was very humiliating and physically painful. And now at Easter, we celebrate something completely unique in all human history: that Christ rose from the dead, leaving behind an empty tomb and appearing to His disciples.

On this Easter day, we contemplate a mystery we cannot explain. Even more, we actually enter into the mystery of Christ’s Resurrection because of our Baptism and through our sharing in the sacrament of His Body and Blood, the Holy Eucharist. In today’s celebration, therefore, we are being drawn into the mystery of the Resurrection and the dawning of life eternal. We set aside our normal ways of thinking and acting, and create a new definition to what is “real,” genuine, and true. Instead of being limited to what we see and can explain, we choose to commit ourselves to what is unseen. We choose not the path of normal knowledge, but rather, the wisdom of the heart. We hand ourselves over to a mystery.

Consider the Gospel for this morning. It is indeed a story of mystery. Just like any other mystery story, adventure, or thriller, there has been a death, and now, people are trying to make sense of it. Mary Magdalen goes to the tomb—perhaps just to be near her departed loved one, or maybe in hopes of anointing His body. And she discovers that someone else was there ahead of her... God the Father, who has raised His Son from the dead!

But it will take Mary Magdalen a few hours before she will be able to put the clues together and make sense of the mystery. First she needs the wisdom and encouragement of Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. She shares with them what little she knows, and they, for their part, enter the tomb and see new pieces of the puzzle—the wrappings lying on the ground and the piece of cloth not lying with the wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

It begins to dawn on them that the body of Jesus has not been stolen, for robbers would not have taken the time to neatly roll-up the piece of cloth that had covered the head. It also begins to dawn on them that if Jesus left the wrappings behind, it means He is not going to die again. He has truly conquered death. They begin to realize the emptiness of the tomb is not a bad thing but something positive: it means that Christ is no longer confined but is mysteriously present everywhere!

The empty tomb, of itself, must have been a bit disconcerting. The first moment of resurrection faith has to do with recognizing loss and absence, and then, in light of that “shock,” Mary Magdalen, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple began to re-evaluate themselves and everything they thought they understood. They had to reach the point of recognizing they were not in control; they had to open their minds and hearts to the possibility of something completely unheard of—that their beloved friend was risen and, therefore, He must truly be the Son of God, the Promised Messiah!

For all three of them, there was a process of coming to faith in the Resurrection. It took time for them to reach awareness of the full divinity of Jesus. So it is that St. John emphasizes that they first came to the tomb in the dark. In the Greek text of this passage, the verb says the disciples “began to believe.” Easter morning, therefore, is not so much the victorious and happy conclusion to a story of tragic suffering, but rather, the beginning of a whole new journey with new challenges.

Today’s second reading, a passage from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, proclaims that Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. St. Paul then goes on to say that we must celebrate the feast with “*the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Note that St. Paul uses the past tense when he speaks of Christ’s Passover; His sacrificial death and glorious Resurrection have been accomplished. His work is already done. But our work and our mission are yet to be fulfilled, and so, when he speaks about us, St. Paul uses the imperative: “*Get rid of the old yeast... Celebrate the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Yeast symbolizes corruption, for it changes the dough. And so, St. Paul is explaining that if we truly believe in the Resurrection and are going to live our faith in this mystery, we must set aside any malice or evil and allow God to completely take over our mind and heart.

Part of what we celebrate this day is the recognition that we no longer live for ourselves. Mary Magdalen, Simon Peter, and the Beloved Disciple allowed their lives to be completely changed by the Easter event. The same challenge is present for us today. At Easter, we proclaim anew our baptismal faith, our way of sharing in the Death-Resurrection of Christ. On this day, we say that our identity is forever tied up with the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church. We no longer can think of ourselves as isolated or separate individuals but only as members of His Body, sharing in His life. We are not mere spectators watching a mystery movie or reading a mystery story, we are truly participants in the mystery itself! And so it is that we will share together in the sacrificial death and glorious Resurrection of the Lord in just a few moments in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Participating in the mystery of Christ and His risen life is not going to insulate us from pain and suffering. In fact, believers should be all the more aware of the pain of the world and all the more eager to want to share our gifts and talents for the good of others. Note that the risen Christ is still a wounded Christ; even as He heals us, Christ bears the marks of His suffering and death. Our faith that Christ is risen presents a challenge for us: it means we must look for Him everywhere—especially in people and places where our human nature would least want to look—among the poor and the sick, the stranger and the apparently unlovable. The Easter journey invites us to enter the empty tomb such as it unfolds in our own individual and family experiences; but now, we enter into the empty tomb with Christ and, therefore, we need not be afraid. We are no longer alone; we are one with Christ and He with us. We also enjoy the blessing of belonging to His Risen Body, the Church, and so, our challenges are manageable.

On this day, we celebrate the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, a victory we are beginning to share already here and now as we hand our lives over to the Lord each day and try to let the risen Christ permeate every aspect of our lives.

Resurrection celebrates new life, new beginning, and new hope—for all of us and for our world. It is fitting on this day, therefore, that we never lose sight of all those parts of our lives and of our world that still need the dawning light of resurrection and an encounter with the Risen Lord. It is good for us to keep in mind that Christ’s triumph continues to unfold as we set aside violence and anger or bitterness of any kind, praying and working for the conversion and renewal of our whole world. Let us rejoice in the Lord’s victory and pledge to live always as witnesses to another world, the world to come, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, a kingdom of truth, justice, love, and peace. To Him be glory now and for endless ages. Amen. Alleluia.