

HOLY SATURDAY YEAR A: THE EASTER VIGIL OF WORD and OF LIGHT 2020

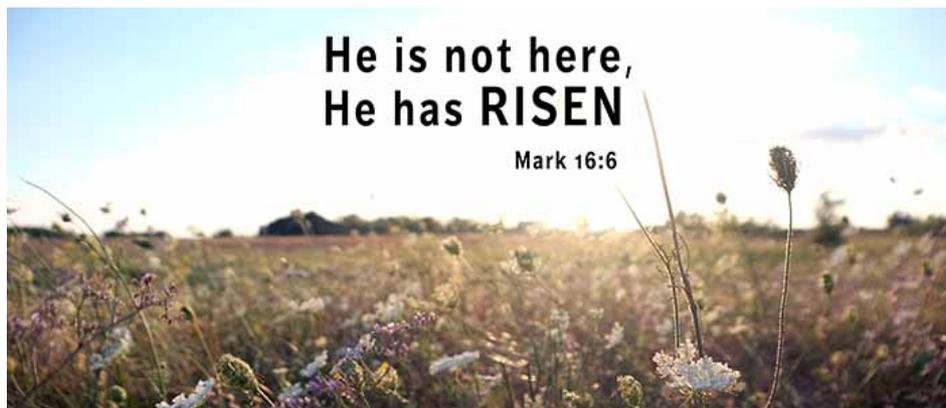
Friends, there is no doubt that for many, if not all of us, *The Easter Triduum*— these Sacred Three Days — are like no other!

Who could have foretold of our Churches and Places of Worship being '*closed down*' throughout the World. Of Christian Lenten and Easter Liturgies being televised and '*celebrated*' in our own lounge rooms, or of the ancient and great Cathedrals of Major Cities — inaccessible to but a few as solemn rituals within, are celebrated by a mere handful of *The Faithful*.



Cities like Valladolid in Spain are renowned for their Holy Week Processions. During Lent, men and women who belong to organised religious groups, like brotherhoods, or guilds, pious societies and the like, prepare to carry religious statues through the streets to commemorate The Passion of Christ. The statues are both life-like and life-sized and many date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Graphically, they show the wounds and suffering of Christ and of His mother, Mary, and others still, the people who were involved in The Passion. The Processions of Good Friday and Easter Sunday are completely different in mood, but together present the drama of God's Plan of Salvation. Whilst on Good Friday the mood is funereal and sombre, on Easter Sunday it is full of joy and gladness! The *black penitential hoods* worn by the men on Good Friday are removed, as are the black *mantilla* head coverings worn by the women. Their bright and joyful faces can be seen again as the women wear *white mantillas* as well as bright colours.

In Valladolid, - *as in the cities and villages of The Philippines* - a Procession carrying a statue of The Risen Christ weaves its way around the streets to meet another *Procession carrying Our Lady* into the Plaza Major. Jesus, *risen from the dead*, greets His mother in *the square or the barrio*, and their statues bow reverentially to one another. Her sorrow is turned into Joy and the Hope of the Resurrection leads to great applause by all present. Families then, usually gather either at home or in local restaurants or cafes to celebrate The Easter Feast with fine wines, and rich food. . . . But not so, This Year!!!



CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

Is our great Proclamation!

Friends, may our hearts be *on fire* with this knowledge, and *our lives* reflect His Resurrection by our commitment to Him! In the Evening of Holy Thursday we recalled and washed one another's feet *in memory* of the one who called us to imitate His *self-giving love*. On Friday we were invited to Commemorate the Death of Jesus, and His being buried in a Tomb. Soldiers were made to guard his *Prison of Death*. . . It seemed like the *defeat* of Life, *the loss* of Freedom, and *the end* of Hope. Darkness had covered the Scene of Calvary and defeated The Light! The Solemn Easter Vigil begins, - you will recall - in this same Darkness, but soon celebrates *The Triumph of The Light*, - the very *light* God fashioned on *The First Day of Creation*; and which now shines forth anew through The Risen Christ! In His Light, we usually read from *The Book of Exodus*, - of God's leading Israel out of their *prison of slavery*; and we read from the Prophet Isaiah - of *God's everlasting love* calling God's Chosen People out of the *prison of their Exile*! Then, with the dawning of *The First Day of the Week*, Mary of Magdala - and the other Mary, return to the Tomb.

Now, the *Creator God*, performs a New Creation as there is a violent earthquake, and the stone that seals the Tomb is rolled away. *Death* is defeated as the *Tomb opens*, and the soldiers become like the corpse they were supposed to guard. All the attempts of the authorities to keep Jesus, *the Lord of Life* in the grave - have failed, and *The Crucified One* shakes off the chains of death, as an angel proclaims: **"He is not here, for He Has Risen!"**

Friends, each one of us will be affected in a different way by the events of The Resurrection. The characters in the Gospel, too, have different reactions to what they witness. Easter Sunday's Gospel flows on from where tonight's passage ends, and we discover how *Mary of Magdala* was upset, because the body of Jesus was missing; of how Peter and the other Disciple — *the one Jesus loved*, set out for the place of burial, as if to join in the search. There is an eagerness about the *Beloved Disciple*, as he runs on ahead, but then, doesn't quite have the courage to go *all of the way* into the Tomb; and so Peter, - almost calmly - walks into the Tomb - he finds nothing — but discovers everything!!! The Easter implication is simply expressed: **"He saw and he believed"**.

Dear friends, there is a wonderful wall painting in a small Church in Istanbul, in Turkey. It shows the Risen Christ standing over the broken gates of The Under-World and he is *full of life, agility and enthusiasm!* His strong hands are pulling Adam and Eve out of *the prison of the grave* — from *the clutches of death itself*, and there is a sense of power and light as The Risen One dispels darkness and death itself! On his feet however, are still the marks of the nails, because the *Resurrection does not forget The Cross* — but allows us 'to remember it' and to recognise the power of that extraordinary divine love, which enters into *The Pain and Suffering of Humanity*; and into death itself for the sake of ALL of God's Creation: redeemed now, through Christ's Cross and Resurrection!

On Easter Night, dear friends, despite the challenges COVID-19 has brought into our lives and our homes, into our *isolated worlds* - we are exultant and filled with the same joy as The Women at the Tomb — the two Mary's, - who forever shall be - *the first disciples of Faith!* With them, we also Rejoice in *the Victory of Christ* over death and in His Invitation - to come out of *the prisons of our fears, of our selfishness and our sin*, in order to share in Christ's Risen Life and - the gifts of *A New Creation!*

The Easter Vigil initiates us into a *Renewed Faith*. We can go forth - through the darkness which forever remains symbolic of the *many present-day Crosses* which shape the journeys and lives of All - as Christ's disciple!

So, let us rejoice in '*Christ Risen*' and '*Give Thanks*' on this '*Great Day of Resurrection!*'

May our hearts be *on-fire with this knowledge*, and may our Lives reflect His Resurrection by our commitment to Christ 'Risen' and His indwelling presence among us! **Amen!**



May the Blessings of New Life be Yours this Easter Season
- For You and Your Loved Ones, and For Our Fragile World! -

A Happy Easter!

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