

Homily for Easter-17<sup>th</sup> April 2022  
Jn. 20:1-9

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Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed, Alleluia.

There is a beautiful story told about a woman named Rosemary who works in the Alzheimer's Unit of a nursing home. Rosemary and a colleague named Arlene brought the residents of the home together one Good Friday afternoon to view Franco Zeffirelli's acclaimed production, *Jesus of Nazareth*. They wondered whether these elderly Alzheimer's patients would even know what was going on, but they thought it might be worth the effort. When they finally succeeded in getting everyone into position, they started the video. Rosemary was pleasantly surprised at the quiet attention being paid to the screen. At last came the scene where Mary Magdalene comes upon the empty tomb and sees that Jesus' body is not there. An unknown man, in reality the Risen Christ, asks Mary why she is looking for the living among the dead. Mary runs as fast as she can back to the disciples and tells Peter and the rest with breathless excitement, "He's alive! I saw Him, I tell you! He's alive." The doubt in their eyes causes Mary to pull back. "You don't believe me . . . You don't believe me!"

From somewhere in the crowd of Alzheimer's patients came the clear, resolute voice of Esther, one of the patients. "WE BELIEVE YOU," she said, "WE BELIEVE YOU".

Well! Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Catholic Church and I see three reasons for the same.

First of all, the Resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian Faith. It is the greatest of the miracles, for it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul in 1st Corinthians 15/14 writes: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your Faith is in vain".

Secondly, Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies..." (Jn 11:25-26).

And thirdly, Easter is a feast which gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows and tears. It reminds us that life is worth living.

The late Catholic Archbishop of Hartford, John Whealon, had undergone cancer surgery resulting in a permanent colostomy when he wrote these very personal words in one of his last Easter messages: "I am now a member of an association of people who have been wounded by cancer. And as you know, that association has as its symbol the phoenix, a bird of Egyptian mythology. The Greek poet Hesiod, who lived eight centuries before Jesus was born, wrote about this legendary bird in his poetry. When the bird felt its death was near, it would fly off to Phoenicia, build a nest of aromatic wood and set itself on fire. When the bird was consumed by the flames, a new phoenix sprang forth from the ashes. Thus, dear friends, he said: the phoenix symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and life after death.

It sums up the Easter message perfectly, he said. Jesus gave up His life, and from the grave He was raised to life again on the third day. New life rises from the ashes of death. Archbishop Whealon went on to his conclusion saying: Today we are celebrating Christ's victory over the grave, the gift of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus. That is why the phoenix bird, one of the earliest symbols of the Risen Christ, also symbolizes our daily rising to new life. Every day, like the phoenix, we rise from the ashes of

sin and guilt and are refreshed and renewed by our living Lord and Savior with His forgiveness and the assurance that He still loves us and will continue to give us the strength we need." Well! Archbishop John Whealon could have lived in a gloomy tomb of self-pity, hopeless defeat, and chronic sadness, but his faith in the Risen Lord opened his eyes to new visions of life.

Remember dear friends! Each time we continue to hope – even when our hope seems unanswered – we share in the power of Jesus’ Resurrection. Each time we display our love of others, we share in the Resurrection. Each time we face a betrayal of trust, we share in the Resurrection of Jesus. Each time we fail in our attempts to ward off temptations – but keep on trying to overcome them – we share in the Resurrection. In short, the message of Easter is that nothing can destroy us – not pain, sin, rejection or death – because Christ has conquered all these, and we too can conquer them if we put our Faith in Him.

And so, we should be able to pray with St. Patrick, “Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ within me, never to part.”

God bless you all, **Amen.**

