

My friends in Christ: the Lord is risen; truly, He is risen! These are the words of an ancient Christian greeting, words that celebrate the historical fact of the empty tomb in all its emptied glory, the amazing reality of the Resurrection. The Lord is risen; truly, He is risen! Let this be our clarion call throughout the Easter season!

And after we heard proclaimed from Sacred Scripture of those earliest days of the Church's history – days which saw rejoicing in the culmination, the fulfillment, of every ancient prophecy, of every hopeful dream: the Resurrection – at long last we got to proclaim that most wondrous word which, through all of Lent, was as forbidden to us as the candy and the coffee and the sweet, sweet Mountain Dew that we gave up for Lent: “alleluia!”

What an amazing proclamation of incredible joy, that word is: Alleluia! “The Lord is risen, alleluia! Truly, He is rise, alleluia!”

And after all that...we finally arrive at the Gospel narrative of what happened next after the Lord was put to death and was buried...and we finally get to hear the story of the *risen* Lord, which we have been waiting anxiously to hear, waiting this entire time, all through these dark, dreary forty-some days of Lent, and what do we find? Nothing! We find *nothing*! Happy Easter, everyone! See you next Sunday!

But the truth of the matter is: this *is* good news, *the* Good News. Nothing *is* good; indeed, *nothing* is the very best thing that we could have ever hoped to find. Because *nothing* is exactly what was there in the tomb – nothing; nobody; no *body*. The tomb is empty. That *nothing* is there means that *something* is up, and *anything* can happen because *everything* is possible for God; including, yes, an empty tomb...no *body*...the death of death itself...the Resurrection.

That Jesus Christ has risen from the dead means, for us, that the gates of Paradise – which, because of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, were closed and locked – are now unlocked and are open once again. Sin and death can never again close Heaven's gates because Jesus has conquered

sin and death, has destroyed them forever. That the Lord is risen (truly, He is risen) means, for us, that Heaven's gate calls to us. And the way to Heaven is forged by the rising from the dead of the Lord Himself. Valleys filled in; mountains and hills made low; winding roads made straight; rough ways made smooth. The way to Heaven is forged anew because the Lord is risen from the dead.

And so, there is much cause for rejoicing here. For we who are Catholic (who are the Body of Christ, the Church) celebrate the Lord's victory over sin and death with every Mass in which we participate, with every Sacrament that we receive. We who are Christian, who already are baptized, by virtue of our Baptism, already begin to enjoy the grace of love, joy, peace, and all good things in the Lord's blessings to us, the *infinite* blessings of His Kingdom, because we have been washed and purified of Original Sin and so have been made co-heirs with Christ Himself and have obtained an inheritance with the elect.

As for those who just became Catholic Christian last night at the Easter Vigil? Those of us who were there with them gave joyful witness to their faithful reception of the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and first Communion. That most holy night of the Easter Vigil saw them experience a tremendous joy and blessing that they *hopefully* will remember for the rest of their lives here on Earth. Their pilgrim's journey of faith throughout this past year has led them to their Easter conversion. The Sacraments that God gave to them (Baptism, Confirmation, and first Communion) – they were *our* gifts, too, given to them – *our* gifts as Church. And at the same time, *they* had a most gracious gift for *us* as well: the joy of their conversion. Their having been received fully into the ranks of the Catholic Christian faithful was, indeed, a truly wonderful gift to all of us, for it is another assurance for us that the Church here on Earth has a future. For despite all of the scandals, all of the troubles, all of the awful attacks against us as Catholics, as Church...those folks made their pilgrim's journey nonetheless...and we were truly blessed to receive them, and all of us together are assured once more that the Church here on Earth is here to stay.

And that last point is so important for us to keep in mind: the Church is here to stay. And there is nothing that you or I or anyone else can do to destroy the Church. All throughout the long and storied history of the Church, there are countless episodes of her near destruction and ultimate survival, even in our own day and age when it seems that the Church stands all alone on the side of right and proper faith and morals. And the world would much rather see the Church and all of her faithful utterly annihilated than be bothered with a holy ideal that is radically different from its own.

But the Church is here to stay. For the Church is the Bride of Christ – and *Christ* is here to stay. The Lord is risen; truly, He is risen; and the Lord is here to stay. Though it certainly seems at times that all the world and even we ourselves definitely want so much to make Him go. That was, after all, what the cross was all about. It was fallen humanity what nailed Him to the Cross. It was our sinfulness what slaughtered Him, our brokenness what broke Him. Yes, we sometimes just try so hard to be against Him, and yet we fail. We nailed Him down, but He rose again; we killed Him, but He lives; we buried Him, but the tomb is empty.

The risen Lord is mankind fully alive, and mankind fully alive is the glory of God. And the Lord is risen; truly, He is risen. Lent has shown us *that* we need to repent and be converted. Now, Easter shows us *why*: Christ is the victor; Christ is the champion; Christ is here to stay.... May it be then that we would receive Him and *be* received *by* Him...that we would side with Him...love Him, rejoice in Him, be at peace in Him...and thus always and everywhere to remain with Him, now and forever.