



PATRIARCHATUS LATINUS - JERUSALEM

بطريركية القدس لللاتين

Easter Vigil 2024

Holy Sepulchre

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

These three days of intense prayer and solemn liturgies all take place around this small Edicule, around the remains of that Sepulchre of which today's Gospel speaks and which we have kept and venerated since then. The liturgy of Jerusalem is built around this Place, as is the liturgy of the whole Church. It is from here that we draw the light that enlightens the entirety of Christian life. We the Church of Jerusalem must be and want to be the first to announce the arrival of this light and to bring it to the world. In a simple and solemn way, we did this a few moments ago, when we lit the Paschal Candle from inside the Sepulchre. The Light coming from the empty Tomb is the light of the Paschal Lamb of which the Book of Revelation speaks "...in it I saw no temple: the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple..." (Rev. 21:22) the Lamb Who enlightens the Holy City and the Church. We want the light of the Risen One to enlighten the way we see this city, the Holy Land, the world and the Church, which lives and grows in the world. We seek to see with meekness, with serene trust in God's work, in a way that does not leave us at the mercy of darkness and in the shadow of death.

The Gospel I have just proclaimed calls us back to look at things with meekness. The Risen One does not impose Himself: He returns victorious from the battle against death, but does not go to humiliate those who had crucified Him and He does not prove His point. Nor He does reproach the disciples who had betrayed, denied and abandoned Him. He does not punish anyone, He does not impose himself, He does not return triumphantly to the scene from which He had been violently eliminated.

In today's Gospel Jesus is not even seen, but He leaves signs, so that those who desire Him, those who seek Him, may finally meet him anew. To encounter the Risen One we need to learn to recognize the signs of His presence, the ways in which He comes into our history.

The evangelist tells us first of all that the women looked up (Mk. 16:4). The expression means that something new has happened, something that did not depend on human strength. It means that God has made Himself present. To see this wonder, man must look up and be open to the idea that something new can happen. To see the signs of the Risen One, we must look up it is what we need most today: to look up.

The terrible days we are living, have locked us in, they seem to have annihilated our expectations, to have closed all roads and erased the future. Even our relationships seem reduced, wounded by mistrust and by misunderstandings if not by betrayal. Everything around us seems to speak to us of failure, just as the death of Jesus had appeared to be a failure or the end of a nice project of rebirth, of change, of new life on which the disciples had placed their hopes. Our intentions for peace, reconciliation and dialogue seem like failures today. Our desire for a serene life and for meetings that unlock horizons seem to have failed, just as our thirst for a fulfilled justice and for welcoming truth seem to have failed. The life of our community of believers also seems to be without a future. Everything seems to speak about the end, about death. It is just like it was in the Gospel when the women went to the Sepulchre to weep in mourning.

But if only we looked up, if only we stopped being self-absorbed by our pain and trapped behind the boulders that keep us closed in our tombs, perhaps we too, just like the women in today's Gospel would be able to see something new, something that is being fulfilled.

The women go to the tomb early in the morning, at sunrise. They ask themselves who could help them to roll away the stone, because they had seen that the stone was very large (Mk. 16:3). It is there that they see the open tomb. The women saw something new, the new event they saw is the fact that the stone had already been rolled away (Mk 16:4), and that the kingdom of death no longer locks its gates and no longer holds anyone prisoner. We still enter death, but we no longer remain in it, we go beyond it. Jesus has unhinged the gates of the kingdom of death with the only weapon which death cannot resist, which is love. If we remain in love, we are no longer prisoners of death. Death, which once held mankind in its power, trapping men in its kingdom of loneliness and silence, no longer has the capacity to keep anyone captive. If we love, we are free, we are risen.

It seems to me that sometimes a tombstone is placed on our hearts and on our eyes. We are here before this Tomb, then, to ask for that stone to be removed and for the light of the Lamb to shine again on our eyes. We are here to ask for the courage of that love that has the strength to defeat the fear that grips us today and keeps us bound. In this sea of hatred that surrounds

us, we want to ask for the courage to look up to see the removal of the stone that covers our tombs, the good being fulfilled, the courage of lives given, the steadfast desire of many men and women who build relationships of peace, the pain of those who do not give up on others. We would then see priests, religious men and women committed to caring for their communities, to protecting them from fear, to binding up their wounds, to building unity.

They are signs that can be seen and found, but only if we cultivate the desire to look for them, and if we do not grow tired of challenging ourselves. They are meek signs, that do not impose themselves and that cannot be found unless they are sought and wanted. The liturgy we are celebrating is rich in signs: the Word, the light, the water, the bread and wine, the Tomb. They are all signs that speak to us about the victory over death, but they remain silent signs if our heart is not free, if we are not seeking the Risen One, if we are no longer waiting for anything.

Celebrating Easter also means renewing the courage of being a seeker of living with the right expectations, of questioning with freedom the signs that surround us, of looking up with trust and freedom, without expecting others to look up to us. Jesus looks to us and that is enough.

This is an initial response to our question, about where and how to meet the Risen One. We do meet Him every time we choose to love and forgive. Only thus the stones that close our tombs can be rolled away.

The evangelist Mark speaks of a young man in white robes who asks the women not to be afraid (Mk. 16:5-6). The women enter the tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus, but they do not find Him. They enter expecting death, but death is no longer there. In its place there is a young man, a life that is beginning. He is dressed in white, which is the color of God. Where death once reigned, now God's life has come.

The angel once again invites the women to look: "Behold the place where they had laid him" (Mk. 16:6).

To see the Risen One, the women are invited to set on the way, to go to the disciples, so that they too may set out on the way and go to Galilee: there they will see him (Mk. 16:7).

The place of the encounter with the Risen One is Galilee, which is where the disciples began to follow to Jesus: we meet the Risen One where we experience a new beginning, a new start.

We meet the Lord where we allow Him to take us out of our tombs and when are not paralyzed by our fears, that would prevent us from walking. Every time fear is conquered, every time a new step of humanity and fraternity is taken, the risen Lord makes Himself present in our life.

What I wish you all, what I wish to us all gathered here in this Holy Place, and to our whole Church is to stop seeking among the dead He who is alive (cf. Lk. 24:5). My wish and prayer is that we do not waste our time following purely human hopes, to not chase after the chimeras

of easy solutions to our problems, which often are preludes to bitter disappointments. May the center of our lives no longer be our own pain but, like the women of the Gospel, may we have a renewed desire to look up, and to see more than ourselves. As long as we shall be focused only on ourselves, we will not see anything but ourselves, we will never find any sign, we will never see any light. May today's Easter be an invitation to set out on the way to go to our Galilees of today, and to seek the signs of His presence, which is a presence of life, love and light. May we find Him in all those who are still capable of acts of love and forgiveness, which the world thirsts for today more than ever. I ask for this gift and grace for all of us, for our Church in Jerusalem, that it may always be the Church that lives, hopes, loves and walks in the light of the Lamb.

Happy Easter!

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