



Easter Sunday 2024

Holy Sepulcher

Homily

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

We have finally arrived at the long-awaited day. The Easter of the Lord and our Easter! We have also arrived at the Tomb of Christ, like Mary of Magdala, like the Apostles John and Peter, to bow before this mystery of His resurrection, and to welcome this extraordinary gift that is His life in us. Throughout the week, we celebrated beautiful and ancient liturgies, which sought to physically retrace the human experience of Jesus in the same Places. And especially in this same Place where He was buried. And now that all these beautiful liturgies are coming to an end, we ought to ask ourselves what we learnt and how did the many meaningful gestures which have accompanied us during these days impacted us. In this terrible time, marked by so much violence in our Land and throughout the world, are we still able to accept the proclamation of life, love and light that Easter brings?

The Gospel speaks of the night and darkness that are no longer frightening, for they are about to yield to the light of the looming morning. It speaks of a mighty stone, which was overturned and no longer closing anything; of disciples that run; of cloths - *signs of death* - that no longer bind anyone; of eyes that see; of hearts that believe; and of Scripture that has been revealed to full understanding. It is a Gospel full of momentum and life. It is a word of life that still reaches us today and touches our hearts.

At this moment, we want to express our gratitude to the Holy Father who, once again, expressed his closeness to our Christian communities, with a beautiful letter, he sent on the eve of the Holy Triduum, which has accompanied us in our prayer and time of reflection during these days. The Pope has invited us to be "*lamps shining in the night*." And really, as we have already said many times, this night of violence and war never seems to end. Everything seems to be shrouded in distrust. The only strong and decisive voice seems to be that of weapons. In vain have been the many attempts to cease hostilities. Useless seem to be the calls for cease-fire, which tried to resolve the conflict in a different way than with weapons. Well, did the prophet Jeremiah say of us, "If I walk out into the field, look! those slain by the sword; If I enter the city, look! victims of famine. Both prophet and priest ply their trade in a land they do not know." (*Jer. 14:18*).

This tremendous crisis has marked all our lives, without distinction. Different reasons from each other, yet everyone has been deeply hurt by this tragedy. One feels alone, abandoned, perhaps even betrayed. Grief engulfs everyone and we cannot understand and interpret the times. However, one thing we begin to understand: it is time to begin again. There will be a need for resurrection, for new life. In personal relationships, in interfaith dialogue, in political life, in social life, we will not be able to go back to living as if nothing had happened. We will need a new spirit, a new momentum, a new vision, where no one is excluded. The Passover of Christ, which we celebrate today in mystery, we will also need to celebrate in the life of this Church of ours and of the entire Holy Land! Meaning, we will need to make bold choices, capable of responding to the expectations of all. We will have to make a serious commitment so that words like "hope, peace, truth, forgiveness and encounter" become meaningful again and are perceived as credible by all of us, and we should do so placing gestures in the territory that little by little rebuild the trust so deeply wounded. Just now, in the beautiful sequence, we sang, "*Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando: dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus*" (*Easter sequence*): "Death and life have fought each other, and the Lord of life, who was dead, now reigns alive". We, the Church, are the Place where this Kingdom persists, where Christ reigns alive. And alive our community is called to be. To live Easter today, and to be men and women of the resurrection,

means having the courage to defend the dignity of every life, not to fear the looming night, remaining still and fearful, locked in our cenacles. Today's Gospel asks us to abandon our securities, to go out despite the night, like the women of the Gospel, to meet the Risen One. In the duel between night and day, between death and life, we want to be those who choose life. Meaning, we want to be those who have the courage to bet on peace, to continue to trust our neighbor, to not fear betrayals, to be capable without tiring, of starting over each time and build relationships of fraternity, moved not by the expectation of success, but by the desire for goodness and life that the Risen One has placed in our hearts.

We want all this because today we believe and proclaim that God the Father has made room in the life of each of us forever. The resurrection is the irruption of his life in ours, and the irruption of the power of his love in us. That is why we cannot stand still in the night, that is why we also ran here, to the tomb of Christ, and that is why from here, we today want to go out and resume with momentum our commitment to build with confidence in the Church and with the Church, relationships of life and love.

Today we say that we believe all of this. Today's Easter tells us that the fullness of the relationship between the Father and the Son, from that Easter morning, has also become ours. Therefore, there is no place in our realm of existence, in our history, that potentially cannot be inhabited by God, a place of encounter with Him. There is no space in life where He cannot be present. This awareness does not exempt us from experiencing trial, pain, and the night, as it has become part of our daily life. All this remains, but it is no longer a condemnation: we can enter those situations with confidence that God is with us, that even in such situations he can bring life. That even in those moments' life will emerge out of death.

When she discovers that the stone has been turned over and that the Lord's body is no longer there, Mary does a fundamental thing, which is to go and communicate this extraordinary event to Peter and the disciples. The experience of the resurrection cannot be understood unless it is shared, unless it becomes a life lived, experienced, and proclaimed. And that is what we want to commit ourselves to today, in our families, in our retirement homes, in

services to the poor and the little ones, in schools, hospitals, prisons, in the joy of so many who continue to give their lives to others. Wherever someone gives part of himself, there the Risen One is celebrated. Where people bet on trust, there the Risen One triumphs.

Let us ask and pray for us to experience the same event that changed the lives of Mary of Magdala, of Peter and John and then of all the other disciples. And, after them, of so many prophets and saints of all times.

We ask here for the grace and gift of a heart capable of discerning the signs of the Risen One, of the Living One in our midst, of a concrete, consoling, tender presence. Only love can conquer death and surpass the boundaries of time. Therefore, let us ask for the gift of discerning love in the life of our community, which we have celebrated in the liturgy of Holy Week.

And so, in the spirit of the Risen One, we want to be the leaven that ferments the whole dough (1 Cor. 5:6), *"lamps shining in the night"* and *"seeds of goodness in a land rent asunder by conflict"*. (Pope Francis' letters to the HL Catholics), the little remnant that does not give in, does not retreat, but with enthusiasm and courage, having conquered all fear, goes before Him. In Galilee, in our homes, in our Churches, where man is lonely or lost, there we want to go, to say once again, that the Lord has visited us, we have seen him. The Risen One is still here among us, and everywhere he goes before us. And he is waiting for us.

Happy Easter!

Jerusalem, March 31, 2024

†Pierbattista Card. Pizzaballa
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem