

Good morning,

Christ has risen! Alleluia!

I was honored when Father Michael asked me to deliver the Easter Sermon, and as I started writing, and thinking about the year we've just lived through, I realized that in some way, I feel like I'm delivering two years worth of Easter Sermons. Last year at Easter it was hard for me to feel that Alleluia feeling, as we were deep in the depths of the first wave of COVID 19. This has been a devastating, terrible year. And Christ has risen anyway! And it is difficult to *hold* all of that at once, as difficult as it is to hold cross and resurrection, tragedy and joy, pandemic world and the much to be hoped for post-pandemic world. But hold both we must. Because that is who we are as Christians: the cross and the Resurrection.

One year on those of us here, those of you listening at home, we are alive, and Christ has risen and for these we give THANKS. As the prophet says: “**This** is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

I cannot think of a better day than Easter to celebrate being alive in circumstances where being alive has never seemed less certain, less guaranteed. No better day to celebrate life. That we are alive, we are embodied, that every one of our bodies was made in the image of God. That for one more morning, we arise, and we move through the world. Alleluia.

But resurrection does not come without death, and death we have witnessed this year and it is well and truly understandable if Alleluia is not the easiest on the tongue yet. We have to hold both things together. We know that not all can feel rejoicing today. Christ is risen. The good news is Good. AND. Nearly 3 million people have died of this virus in the past year. 3 million people. That is the equivalent of the entire state of Nevada: gone. Or Mississippi. Or Kansas. That is the nation of Jamaica, gone. Or Qatar. Or Puerto Rico.

It is hard for me to understand those numbers. But it feels important to me to understand those numbers. To understand and through understanding to be able to bear witness to the depth of the grieving of our world right now. I've spent a lot of time in Puerto Rico. And from that time, on an island of just over three million people, this the closest I can come to understanding this death

toll: every relative of mine on the island, every hotel I've stayed in, every home I've stayed in, every person from whom I've bought food, every waiter, the hooligans who scared me on time on a bus, every politician, every piragüero, the woman who gave me a room to stay in the night I was lost on my bicycle, every random stranger I've passed on the street, everyone I've asked for directions, my own adopted godmother. Gone. That is the scale of death this world has witnessed. It has been a long, hard year.

For many of us, this has been the hardest year we've lived through. It's important to remember, for the sake of compassion and mercy, that this is not true for all of us. Within the lifetimes of many of us here there have been other pandemics, some still with us in varying degrees: flu, polio, HIV. Within the lifetimes of many of us here there have been wars and conflicts that have taken this many lives, World War II, Korea, the war in the Congo. It's important to remember this because I have heard too many blithely say we are living in unprecedented times. And that lack of context erases the experiences of those for whom these times are not unprecedented, but are a harsh, even a traumatic reminder of how much loss a human can endure.

Yet that is why we are here, why we come to church, or login to church, on this Easter day, because we believe in a God who became human and endured, suffered, died. A God also, who created humans in the image of Godself, in the image of a God who endures. Humans are made in the image of God who not only endured death, endured humiliation and mockery and the shame of death on a cross. A world that still sees too much death, injustice, disease, tragedy, trauma. Yet, a God who brought goodness out of that endurance, who brought life out of that death. And this Easter, more than any Easter I have known, this is our charge. Bring good out of bad. Three million people have died—how many more are grieving? We can sit with the grieving and walk with them on that path. We can let this pandemic transform us into more giving, more open, more loving people.

To bring good out of bad does not make bad things good. This is why this day, the Feast of the Resurrection does not come without the cross. Without a scared, terrified, hopeless, despairing time when the apostles thought they had lost everything they had put their faith in. They ran. The men fled. The women stayed. Peter denied ever having met someone named Jesus. The great journey, the great adventure they were on seemed over, the Messiah and the dream both dead. The sorrow of that time was so profound that it created a genre of art: the Pieta. Mother Mary's face,

etched with unutterable sorrow as she holds her murdered son. I have seen the face of a mother who has lost her adult son to sudden death and I have seen the face of Mary in her face. With all the death we have faced in the past year, it will be sadly common to see that pain on so many other faces, for years to come.

Even on the very morning of the resurrection it was hard to believe that something—anything—good was coming—could come—from something so excruciatingly bad. In John we read that Mary Magdalene spoke through her tears: “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” The teacher, the hope, the Son of God was dead and his loved ones were now to be denied even the chance to sit, mourning at his grave? All of us who have had to forgo funerals this year for the loved ones we’ve lost must feel with Mary Magdalene as she cries: “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

But this, THIS, is when the sun breaks through, as we read today “He has been raised; he is not here.” Alleluia. He is raised, he is transformed, and his risen body still carries the marks of his torture and death.

Paul writes in Romans: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Christ rose to bring us new life, and to show that new life is possible. Bring joy from pain. Bring new life from despair. This is our Easter Charge, when we emerge from the tomb of this pandemic—whether it’s a vaccine coming to full effectiveness today, or the excruciating wait of someone with severe allergies to the vaccine for the rest of us to protect them with herd immunity—whenever it comes, when we emerge from the tomb of this pandemic: Where can we bring life? How can be the bearers and the spreaders of new life? How can we be transformed? And what marks of this time will we always carry with us? How do we make a post-pandemic world worthy of a resurrection people? How can we bring comfort, joy, peace, reconciliation, justice, freedom: How can we bring LIFE.

Again, the prophet says:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, *
and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.
For behold, darkness covers the land; *

deep gloom enshrouds the peoples.
But over you the Lord will rise, *
and his glory will appear upon you.

Over us, today, the Lord has risen. The glory of the Lord appears upon us today. Through God's grace, we can arise and shine. We can bring comfort to the abandoned, the grieving. With God's help, we can find guidance in prayer. With God's help, we can resist evil. With God's help, when we do fall into sin, we CAN repent and return to the Lord. With God's help we CAN seek and serve Christ in all persons; we CAN love our neighbors as ourselves. We CAN strive for justice and peace among all people. We CAN respect the dignity of every human being.

Christ has risen, Alleluia! And we have all been knocked down, in countless ways, and we can rise as well. With God's help, we will rise. Amén. Alleluia.

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Texts for April 4, 2021

[Psalm 118:1-2,14-24](#);

[Isaiah 25:6-9](#)

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

[Mark 16:1-8](#)



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