

EASTER SUNDAY 2018

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St. Agnes Cathedral, Diocese of Rockville Centre

April 1, 2018

Last night at the Easter Vigil here at St. Agnes Cathedral, we rejoiced in the chanting of the Easter Proclamation, the *Exsultet*, which connects our emotional faith memory with that of our ancestors in the faith.

We hear in the *Exsultet* these words: “Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice arrayed with the lightning of his glory, let this holy building shake with joy, filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.”

“Let this holy building shake with joy....Let this holy building shake with joy.” Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral on this Easter morning shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Tomb of Christ which has been recently restored in Jerusalem.

Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral on this Easter morning shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in St. Peter’s Basilica and St. Peter’s Square in Rome.

Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral on this Easter morning shake with every parish in every part of the world and let every Catholic parish on our beautiful Island shake with the joy of their Mother Church.

And let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral shake this Wednesday, April 4th with the living dream of Dr. Martin Luther King as we commemorate with a vibrant prayer service the 50th Anniversary of his assassination in Memphis.

We remember in a special way at this Easter Sunday Mass our Catholic baptismal responsibility to touch the centuries old wounds of racism in our country and to be instruments of racial harmony and peace.

Archaeology is “the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.”

Many of us find ourselves fascinated by the work of archaeologists. Our imaginations are captured and riveted as we see documentaries that explore discoveries in burial chambers in Ancient Egypt or even artifacts on the battlefields of the Civil War.

Our Catholic Church has always emphasized a bold missionary archaeology that helps shed light on how the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church and how the Church is Apostolic and can be traced back in history to the Apostles and ultimately to Christ himself.

We have some very powerful examples. In the late 1930s, Pope Pius XII at a time of world crisis commissioned archaeologists to go through an Old Roman Cemetery underneath the Vatican to see if the Bones of St. Peter could be rediscovered.

They were rediscovered and those of us who have had the opportunity to take a Scavi tour in Rome know that as a result of the experience you never pray the Creed at the Sunday Mass quite the same way again.

As Catholics celebrating Easter Sunday 2018, it is important that we are aware of the recent renovation and archaeological discoveries around the Edicule, the Tomb of Jesus Christ, which is inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

There is an inscription right outside the Edicule that reads: “This is the Center of the World.” That is what we celebrate this Easter morning – that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Center of the World and the Center of our Existence.

A March 21st, 2017 report from the Associated Press describes the process: “The tomb of Jesus has been restored to its former glory. Just in time for Easter, a Greek restoration team has completed a historic renovation of the Edicule, the shrine that tradition says houses the cave where Jesus was entombed and resurrected, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Gone is the unsightly iron cage built around the shrine by British authorities

in 1947 to shore up the walls. Gone is the black soot on the shrine's stone façade from decades of pilgrims lighting candles. And gone are fears about the stability of the old shrine, which hadn't been restored in more than 200 years...

The limestone and marble structure stands at the centre of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre one of the world's oldest churches – a 12th Century building standing on the 4th century remains. The shrine needed urgent attention after years of exposure to environmental factors like water, humidity and candle smoke...A restoration team from the National Technical University of Athens stripped the stone slabs from the shrine's façade and patched up the internal masonry of the shrine, injecting it with tubes of grout for reinforcement. Each stone slab was cleaned of candle soot and pigeon droppings, then put back in place. Titanium bolts were inserted into the structure for reinforcement, and frescos and the shrine's painted dome were given a face-lift.

The restorers also made some discoveries. On October 26, 2016, the team entered the inner sanctum of the shrine, the burial chamber of Jesus, and temporarily slid open an old marble layer covering the bedrock where Jesus' body is said to have been placed.

Below the outer marble layer was a white rose marble slab engraved with a cross, which the team dated to the late Crusader period of the 14th century. Beneath that marble slab was an even older, grey marble slab protecting the bedrock, and mortar on the slab dates to the 4th century, when Roman Emperor Constantine ordered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built. The restorers have cut a small window from the shrine's marble walls for pilgrims to see –for the first time – the bare stone of the ancient burial cave.

'It seems we are in front of levels of history that are validated,' said Antonia Moropoulou, who supervised the renovation."

To summarize: the first layer over the place where Jesus' body lay after the crucifixion which was visible was removed first. This exposed a layer from the late-Crusader era of the 14th century with a Lorraine cross on it. This layer was removed. The next layer discovered was from the fourth century,

when the emperor Constantine built the original church. Underneath that 4th century layer was the exposed rock bench.

“It was really important to see the bench, very flat and almost complete, from the right to the left, almost for the shape of one man who can stay on it,” said Fr. Eugenio Alliata, an Italian archaeologist in Jerusalem who is a member of a Franciscan group that looks after Christian sites in the Holy land. “This was really something very important. And it was the first time it has been documented as it is.” (NPR report March 20, 2017)

Nizar Halloun, a journalist for *The Holy Land Review*, spoke about his experience inside the tomb: “I bent down to see. It’s as if time and space just stopped. The feeling was not tied to the fact that the tomb had not been opened for so many years, but that there were no longer any barriers. There was a direct contact between what had happened 2000 years ago and now. If you lift off a simple stone, you are in direct contact with history itself. No longer were there barriers between past and present.” (*The Holy Land Review*, Summer 2017 issue, 38)

On this Easter Sunday 2018, as we marvel at the renovation and recent archaeology of Christ’s Tomb, the Edicule, we invite the Holy Spirit to accomplish a bold missionary archaeological expedition and restoration within our own souls and within the entire universal Church.

We join with the Holy Father in his *Urbi et Orbi Message* earlier this morning in praying to the Risen Lord for Syria, Yemen, the Holy Land and the entire Middle East, South Sudan, the Korean peninsula, the Ukraine and Venezuela.

As we pray for the peace of the Risen Christ for the world this Easter morning, we ask ourselves: Have we sealed up our souls with the type of rock that sealed Christ’s Tomb?

Have the hurts and traumas of life, the sins of life, the disappointments, cynicism and failures of life, sealed us up and short-circuited our response to the uplifting power of the Risen Christ?

Let's remove the barriers, let's remove the layers of slab that prevent us from experiencing the presence, power and Light of the Risen Christ in our souls, in our marriages, in our families, in our Church, and in our World.

Let's make this Easter season a time when we open up in a new way to the power of the Risen Christ.

Let's lower our defenses. Let's roll away the stones that would limit us. Let's allow the Risen Christ's glorified wounds to touch our wounds.

And let's let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral on this Easter morning shake in unison with the holy building of the Edicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and every holy building, Basilica, Cathedral and parish around the world.

Let's let the love and power of the Risen Christ shake this beautiful Island, shake it with *dramatic missionary growth*.