

**Easter Sunday 2023**  
**Homily of Bishop John Barres**  
**St. Agnes Cathedral**  
**April 9, 2023**

**Within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, there is the site of Calvary and the Crucifixion and the site of the Resurrection, the Tomb of Christ often called the “Edicule.”**

**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, the Center of our Catholic Faith and the Center of our Existence.**

**In 2016 and 2017, there was some significant archaeological and restorative work done on Christ’s tomb.**

**During this restoration work, scientists discovered that much of the Edicule rests on a fragile foundation of unstable rubble, decayed mortar and tunnels.**

**So more archaeology and more foundational reinforcement will continue to be necessary to preserve the Edicule.<sup>1</sup>**

**Just as the foundation of Christ’s Tomb in Jerusalem at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre needs to be reinforced and strengthened, so too do our lives.**

**Easter morning is a time for us to realize even more deeply that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of our lives.**

**St. Paul writes: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.” (1 Cor 15:17)**

**The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith and the “fulcrum” of Salvation history and of our lives on earth.**

---

<sup>1</sup> See Cecile Lemoine, “Holy Sepulcher, the Work in Progress,” in *Holy Land Review*, Spring 2023, Volume 16 #2, 16-17.

**In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis states: “Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated the world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force...Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history...Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.” (276)**

**Think for a moment of every Gospel Empty Tomb experience and Resurrection appearance that we pray and celebrate this Easter season. They rekindle our hope in a world that seems at time very dark. They rekindle our fire to be missionary disciples of mercy to the world.**

**Think of John 20 and Mary Magdala discovering the empty tomb in the dark – her running to tell Simon Peter and John and in turn John and Peter running to the tomb in hope and expectation.**

**Think of Luke 24 and the two men in dazzling garments saying to the women before the empty tomb: “Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised.”**

**Think of Luke 24 where the Risen Christ points to his glorious wounds and says: “Look at my hands and my feet.” His wounds do not disappear from the Crucifixion to the Resurrection.**

**At the Easter Vigil, we pray this prayer as we insert five grains of incense into the Paschal Candle: “By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us.”**

**The holy and glorious wounds of the Risen Christ touch our spiritual, emotional and physical wounds so that we can be the Risen Christ’s Divine Mercy instruments in helping to heal the wounds of the world.**

**The holy and glorious wounds of the Risen Christ touch the wounds of those suffering now in Ukraine and in every war-torn area of the world.**

**We join with the Holy Father in his *Urbi et Orbi Message* to the City of Rome and the World earlier this morning. Pope Francis asked us to pray to the Risen Lord for the people of Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Syria, the Holy Land and the entire Middle East, Tunisia, Haiti, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Congo, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Myanmar and Rohingya.**

**Think of Jesus addressing Thomas in John 20: “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” And then Thomas’ emotional profession of faith that rings and echoes through the centuries: “My Lord and my God!”**

**Think of the Resurrected Christ in John 21 appearing to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias after a frustrating night of fishless fishing. The Risen Lord says very simply: “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.”**

**That “something” was a miraculous catch of fish, followed by a breakfast of bread and fish cooked on a charcoal fire. This passage concludes with him asking Simon Peter three times: “Simon, Son of John, do you love me?” – an experience of mercy and forgiveness for Peter as it echoed and paralleled his three fold denial of the Lord.**

**Think of the two disciples in Luke 24 who meet Jesus on the Road to Emmaus and whose hearts burn with the Risen Lord’s explanation of the fulfillment of the Scriptures and who recognize him at the breaking of the bread.**

**The mystery of the Road to Emmaus reminds us that a Eucharistic Revival in the United States requires, at the same time, a Biblical Revival.**

**Think of the description of St. Paul’s encounter with the Risen Lord in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and the words of Jesus to him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me...I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.” It is the Risen Lord who transforms Saul the Christian persecutor into Paul the unstoppable missionary.**

**Every one of these descriptions of the Empty Tomb experiences of the disciples or the Resurrection appearances of Jesus is an expression of the Mercy of the Risen Christ.**

**Fear and locked doors surrender to love and bold witness to the Risen Christ.**

**The Light of the Risen Lord illumines all our future graves, our tombs and our family cemetery plots.**

**What a difference to contemplate our own death in the Light of the Risen Christ and our firm and confident belief in Eternal Life.**

**As we enter the Empty Tomb on this Easter Sunday morning, we ask the Risen Christ to roll away the stones that obstruct the flow of grace in the Church's mission.**

**For instance, consider our Holy Father Pope Francis' words in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013). He speaks about the "pastoral acedia" (82), the cynicism, disillusionment and lack of deep and true faith that can obstruct the Church's global mission.**

**He writes: "A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum." (83)**

**We ask the Risen Lord to de-mummify our Catholic witness in the public square. We ask the Risen Lord to roll away the stones of sin, fear, anger, resentment, skepticism, doubt, resistance and rebellion from our hearts.**

**We ask the Holy Spirit to expel any dimension of a "Tomb Psychology" in the way we live.**

**We ask the Holy Spirit to take us from a "Tomb Psychology" to an "Empty Tomb Psychology" that boldly trusts in the Victory of the Risen Christ**

**Every Catholic saint was formed in the biblical passages of the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday.**

**Every saint was forged in the Resurrection Appearances and Narratives that we celebrate in the Easter Octave and throughout the Easter season.**

**Every saint lives in their particular moment of history an "Empty Tomb Psychology."**

**Every saint in silent prayer takes Christ's direction where to cast the nets of contemplative Catholic evangelization.**

**As we think of the archaeological restoration work in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem that will reinforce the foundation beneath Christ's Tomb, we ask that the Holy Spirit will deepen the foundation of our lives this Easter Sunday with the power, peace and joy of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

