

**Easter Sunday Morning Mass
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
April 24, 2011**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Looking at me holding these palm branches, you might think that I got my dates or liturgical calendar mixed up. I know that today is Easter, not Palm Sunday, but I brought these palms as a reminder that there is a connection between the Lord's grand entrance into Jerusalem that we commemorated last Sunday and our Easter celebration of new life: for Jesus entered into Jerusalem to be glorified, but His glory would come not from the jubilation of the crowd but from His exaltation on the cross and His rising from the tomb.

Looking at these palm branches, we see the intricate care that was taken to weave these branches into exquisite patterns. These branches symbolize the exquisite patterns of our lives, as we weave our minds through education, our hearts through our experiences, and our souls through our relationships. But we are reminded that these palms will be burned before Lent next year, their ashes to be placed upon our foreheads to remind us that we are dust, and unto dust we shall return, as the

intricate patterns of our lives on earth are snuffed out through death. That would be a depressing message if it ended there, but thankfully it does not. Our celebration of Easter affirms that life does not end in a heap of ashes, but indeed rises anew from those very ashes.

Throughout these forty days of Lent, we have been reminded of our weaknesses and frailty, but even in our Lord's terrible suffering and death on the cross, we begin to see glimpses of something more, for the cross symbolizes not only Christ's death, but also His resurrection, and it is in Christ's resurrection that we are given the hope of sharing in the glory of the Kingdom through the resurrection of our own glorified body.

In a few moments, all of us will be asked to renew our baptismal promises. The questions that make up the baptismal promises are taken from the Apostles Creed, and the last of these questions asks, "Do you believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?" This question is not about the resurrection of Jesus' body; that comes in an earlier question: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ ... who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified died and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?" No this last question about the

resurrection of the body refers not to Jesus' body, but to our body. Nevertheless, there is a connection between the two.

St. Paul explained in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too. Indeed we should then be exposed as false witnesses of God, for we have borne witness before him that he raised up Christ; but he certainly did not raise him up if the dead are not raised; Why? Because if the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised; and if Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless" (1 Cor. 15:13-17). Christ's death on the cross of Good Friday leads directly to the new life of resurrection.

In his encyclical letter on the Gospel of Life, *Evangelium Vitae*, our late Holy Father, the great Pope John Paul II explained the connection between Good Friday and Easter: "I would like to pause with each one of you to contemplate the One who was pierced and who draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 19:37; 12:32). Looking at 'the spectacle' of the Cross (cf. Lk 23:48) we shall discover in this glorious tree the fulfillment and the complete revelation of the whole Gospel of life.

“In the early afternoon of Good Friday, ‘there was darkness over the whole land ... while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two’ (Lk 23:44, 45). This is the symbol of a great cosmic disturbance and a massive conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between life and death. Today we too find ourselves in the midst of a dramatic conflict between the ‘culture of death’ and the ‘culture of life’. But the glory of the Cross is not overcome by this darkness; rather, it shines forth ever more radiantly and brightly, and is revealed as the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life.

“Jesus is nailed to the Cross and is lifted up from the earth. He experiences the moment of his greatest ‘powerlessness’, and his life seems completely delivered to the derision of his adversaries and into the hands of his executioners: he is mocked, jeered at, insulted (cf. Mk 15:24-36). And yet, precisely amid all this, having seen him breathe his last, the Roman centurion exclaims: ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’ (Mk 15:39). It is thus, at the moment of his greatest weakness, that the Son of God is revealed for who he is: on the Cross his glory is made manifest.

“By his death, Jesus sheds light on the meaning of the life and death of every human being. Before he dies, Jesus prays to the Father, asking forgiveness for his persecutors (cf. Lk 23:34), and to the criminal who asks him to remember him in his kingdom he replies: ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ (Lk 23:43). After his death ‘the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised’ (Mt 27:52). The salvation wrought by Jesus is the bestowal of life and resurrection. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus had indeed bestowed salvation by healing and doing good to all (cf. Acts 10:38). But his miracles, healings and even his raising of the dead were signs of another salvation, a salvation which consists in the forgiveness of sins, that is, in setting man free from his greatest sickness and in raising him to the very life of God.”

The Holy Father continued, “But there is yet another particular event which moves me deeply when I consider it. ‘When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit’ (Jn 19:30). Afterwards, the Roman soldier ‘pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water’ (Jn 19:34).

“Everything has now reached its complete fulfillment. The ‘giving up’ of the spirit describes Jesus’ death, a death like that of every other human being, but it also seems to allude to the ‘gift of the Spirit’, by which Jesus ransoms us from death and opens before us a new life.

“It is the very life of God which is now shared with man. It is the life which through the Sacraments of the Church—symbolized by the blood and water flowing from Christ's side—is continually given to God’s children, making them the people of the New Covenant. From the Cross, the source of life, the ‘people of life’ is born and increases.”

As “people of life,” we are called to respect and protect all human life from conception to natural death. As “people of life,” we look forward to the new life that awaits us when our bodies will be raised from the dead. Talking to people, however, at wakes and funerals, I am not sure that even good, practicing Catholics understand what our faith teaches about life after death. I get the impression that people think that when we die, we leave our bodies behind and live on forever like angels or spirits. That is not what we believe. That is a Greek concept, the immortality of the soul, not the Judeo-Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. The

resurrection of the body “means not only that the immortal soul will live on after death, but that even our ‘mortal body’ will come to life again” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 990).

No, after death there is a period of time when the soul is separated from the body, but that state is temporary. Our Catholic faith tells us that “the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus’ Resurrection” (CCC, # 997). When will this happen? On the “last day,” “at the end of the world” (CCC, # 1001). That day is known as the Second Coming of Jesus, the Last Judgment, when Christ will judge the living and the dead. “All the dead will rise” (CCC, # 998), “those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (*John* 5:29; cf. *Daniel* 12:2).

What will our bodies be like? That is a natural and logical question, but St. Paul says that it is a “nonsensical question” (1 *Cor.* 15:36). Nevertheless, he answers by saying that “what rises is glorious” (1 *Cor.* 15:43). Christ “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body”

(CCC, # 999). We get a hint of that by the accounts of the disciples encountering the Risen Lord in His glorified body. They were able to see Him and talk with Him, He ate and drank with them. He invited Thomas to touch His wounds. Yet something was different. He was no longer suffering from those wounds. He was able to appear to them in the upper room where they had locked doors. We call this a glorified body.

That means that our resurrected bodies will not be exactly like they are now, thank God. No one would want to live forever with the aches and pains of this life. But our glorified bodies will have no more suffering, no more sickness, no more sadness, no more tears. We will be freed of our disabilities and diseases. I was talking about this once at a Confirmation, and there was a young man confined to a wheel chair, suffering from a disability that constricted his movements. When I described our belief in the resurrection of the body and the promise of a glorified body free of its disabilities, he let out a cheer. That was the best news he had ever heard: some day he will have a body that is not stuck in that wheel chair.

That is indeed Good News that gives us hope. That is something for all of us to cheer about. The Lord is Risen. Alleluia! Let us live our lives so as to receive this reward.

May God give us this grace. Amen.