

**Homily for the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night and for the
Mass of Easter Sunday
March 30 and 31, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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Reverend Fathers and Deacon(s), consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, “Who would believe what we have heard” (Isaiah 53:1)?

This past week has been filled with much emotion: the anticipated joy of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem as a triumphant king; the humility of Jesus in His washing the feet of His disciples and their humility in allowing Him to do so; the wonder of the institution of the Eucharist and of the priesthood; the sorrow of Jesus’ betrayal; the agony of His crucifixion; the sorrow of His death; the heaviness of heart at His burial; and the confusion that ensued.

Yes, who would believe what we have heard, that the one who was nailed to the cross, breathed His last breath, and was pierced with the lance is dead no more? Who would believe the amazing claim that “He has been

raised” (Luke 24:6)? It seems, according to the normal course of things, preposterous. Yet that is precisely why we are here.

We have come today to celebrate and make much of an absence. We do not celebrate the absence of someone we do not like, but rather the absence of the One who loves us even to the point of death. We come to celebrate not what was found, but what was not found. On entering the tomb, Saint Peter and the beloved disciple “saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered His head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place,” but, as the women before them, “they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus” (John 20:6-7; Luke 24:3).

From the first moment the news spread there were many who were incredulous. As St. Luke’s Gospel puts it, “their story seemed like nonsense, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11). Others claimed instead that the women or the Apostles simply stole the body during the night, even though guards were stationed there to prevent such an undertaking (cf. Matthew 27:65). As it was then so it is today: One question echoes down through the centuries to every man and woman, to every boy and girl: “Who would believe what we have heard?”

There may even be some among us now who think it is nonsense that the Church claims her Lord, who is both God and man, is indeed risen from the dead even as He said.

So what changed? How did those first disciples and apostles move from thinking the idea of resurrection was nonsense, to accepting this mystery as a profound truth that dramatically changed their lives? How do people today move from skepticism to conviction that the Lord is risen, that the gates of heaven have been opened, and that all of us are invited to rise with Him to the glory of heaven? The answer starts with God's grace, but its outcome will depend on whether our minds and hearts are open to hearing this word and receiving the gift of faith.

In this regard, we cannot forget, dear brothers and sisters, that "with Jesus' Resurrection stands or falls the Christian faith... It is the center of our religion."¹ As Saint Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15:17-19). But, on the other hand, if Christ has been raised,

then everything is changed, the world has a new foundation, and death itself has been destroyed.

We have come here [tonight/today] because we know with the certainty that only faith can give that the Lord Jesus Christ is not dead but alive! He appeared to the Eleven, to the women, and to more than five hundred others. He has eaten fish and allowed himself to be touched. He is no ghostly apparition, but lives in His physical, glorified body. And to this same newness of life He calls every person who will believe what we have heard. To those who place their faith in Him, He unites them with Himself in His Body, the Church; He gives to them a share in the very life of the Triune God; and He reserves for them a place in his kingdom of everlasting joy and peace for those who remain faithful to him to the end. All of this is hidden in the finding and in the announcement of the empty tomb in which He had been laid. This is indeed good news and in this proclamation we rejoice and cry out, "Alleluia! He is risen!"

On these three simple words, "He is risen," rests the foundation not only of our faith, but of every aspect of our lives. If we truly believe that Christ is risen from the dead and that we have been given the hope of rising with Him to new life, our lives can never be the same as they were

before we accepted this gift of faith. Like those first disciples whose lives were changed completely when they came to believe in the resurrection, Christ's message of salvation changes the hearts and lives of all those who believe, permeates everything we see, everything we think, everything we say, and we everything we do. Our lives so closely imitate the Lord that each of us becomes one great cry of, "Alleluia!" and so brings that light and hope of the Lord's love to a world darkened by sin. The lives of true believers become an unmistakable sign that Christ Jesus is risen indeed.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Romano Guardini, *The Lord*. Elinor C. Briefs, trans. (Washington, D.C: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1982), 475.