

**Homily for Easter Morning Mass
April 5, 2015**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Anne Frank, the teenage girl who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II, used to play with her future stepsister, Eva Schloss, when they were children. After the war, Eva's mother married Anne's widowed father, Otto Frank. Both families had lost treasured family members in the Holocaust, like so many other Jewish families in that dark period of human history.

During a radio interview years later, Eva, a former concert pianist, explained how, on Saturday nights before their arrest, the whole family would lie on the floor, in the dark, listening to the exquisite music of Schubert's "Trout" Quintet as their "preparation for sleep." In decades to come, this music, and the memory of those unforgettable evenings, would still bring her joy. Despite having lost so much, she explained that what she would like to pass on to the world was the message enshrined in Louis Armstrong's song, "What a Wonderful World." Instead of learning

bitterness, Eva had learned to appreciate life and its immeasurable capacity for all that is good. In seeing the horrors of the death camps, she saw life and learned to value things that perhaps would remain unnoticed by those who had not faced the ultimate in human brutality. She finished her radio interview by repeatedly saying, "It's a wonderful world!"

Turning our attention to the events of that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene believed that she had lost everything when Jesus died. John's Gospel tells us that, when Jesus died on Calvary, Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John, the beloved disciple, as the dying Jesus entrusted his mother and John to each other. She witnessed at first hand the brutal death on the cross of one that she loved so much.

We do not know why it was that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone on Easter Sunday morning. Was it that she and the other women had agreed to meet there? Was it that she wanted to be alone for a while? Did she, perhaps, want to spare Jesus' mother the agony of seeing her son's body before it was completely prepared for burial? On the day of his death, those preparations had been interrupted by the onset of the sabbath.

Mary's journey was solitary but also risky. Guards protected the tomb lest any of Jesus' disciples tried to remove his body. They were rough men; and she was a solitary woman. The soldiers might or might not allow her access. Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the resurrection. Yet her unexpected news was far beyond the imagining of any of the apostles. Peter and John wanted to verify her story for themselves. It was only when they entered the tomb of Jesus that they realized the truth of the resurrection.

Eva Schloss, an Auschwitz survivor, could proclaim that "It's a wonderful world" in spite of all she had seen and experienced. She discovered the meaning and beauty of life through the appalling suffering of Auschwitz. So too, Mary Magdalene and the apostles found that the death of Jesus would transform their own lives, and it changes our lives as well.

Even while we praise our Lord for the gift of His defeat of the Evil One, we know that there are many battles that lie ahead for us who have chosen to join our alliances to Christ and His Church. Our own personal experience shows us that living the life of Christianity does not mean that we will not struggle. Rather, we can expect to encounter resistance from

the world around us and challenges from the Devil, also called the prince of the world, when we choose to live our lives according to the Gospel. Jesus made this quite clear when He told His disciples: "In the world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). But He does not leave it at that, for He follows this warning up with words of great hope as He tells them: "but take courage, I have conquered the world."

We too are invited to have this same courage when we are confronted with the battles that lie ahead of us, for by His death and Resurrection, which we celebrate today, He has overcome the world and every possible obstacle that could be placed in our way. We, who have been baptized in Christ, have died to our old way of life and have risen to share in His divine life, becoming heirs of the promise that we too will one day share in the victory of eternal life.

In the battles that the people of Israel faced from their enemies and the struggles that they faced among themselves, as we read in the Old Testament, God demonstrated time and again that He would continue to fight for them and give them the help that they would need, just as He did when He freed His people from slavery in Egypt, parting the Red Sea and thus providing a way out of their tribulation. Every generation can count

on that same promise that, no matter what the trial, God will provide a way to safety.

Every generation has been in need of this reminder of God's protection and ultimate victory, for there has never been a time in which no challenges to the Christian way of life were present. The experience of the early Church, which we will hear about in detail throughout the Easter Season in the Acts of the Apostles, was one of constant trial. It was the memory of the victory won on Easter Sunday that gave them the strength to keep from backing down in the face of what seemed to be impossible odds.

When times seemed bleak for Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular, the Easter message of victory was never extinguished. Just as the light of the Paschal Candle pierced the darkness of the night and led us forward at the Easter Vigil last night, so too does our faith in the power of Christ lead us on through the dark stretches of history, past, present, and future.

In our modern day, we are just as much in need of that message of hope as any other time in history. Just a few days ago, we heard of the shocking news of the killing of 148 people at a college in Kenya, a

premeditated attack specifically targeted against Christians. This is just one incident in the recent rash of violence against Christians in our world, particularly in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Such sobering reports leave us with a great sense of sadness and even fear.

In addition to the various forms of physical violence against Christians, we have many examples of ways in which our Catholic and Christian values are being attacked in our world through unjust laws and attitudes which chip away at the foundations that had, at one time, been so solidly established. Finally, there are the many adversities that we may face in our individual lives, such as sickness or other personal setbacks, which can tempt us to question or even doubt our faith.

It can be easy to be pessimistic and without hope in the face of so many trials that confront us, and it is for that reason that we need the Good News of the Resurrection to shake us out of our preoccupation with focusing on the shadow of the Cross in order to see the glory of the empty tomb. The words of St. Augustine, written over 1500 years ago, are every bit as applicable to us today as they were then when he wrote that: "We are an Easter people, and 'alleluia' is our song." We are invited to be that Easter people who are always mindful that Christ has already won the

victory for us. Knowing that, we can have the courage to fight our battles, confident that at the end of our journey, we too will share in that victory.

We Christians are an Easter people who are united with the Risen Christ and who celebrate with great joy this definitive day of victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and life over death, for all eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.