

Christus Resurrexit! Christ is risen!

Easter is a season of Joy. With so much going on in the world that preys upon our peace of mind, let us celebrate the risen Lord who gives us peace, comforts us, and strengthens us.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said, “Cultivate holy boldness, for God loves the strong.” We see in Peter in today’s first reading, an example of that holy boldness.

The events of the Gospel take place very soon after the resurrection. The apostles are in a locked room, hiding, probably in the dark, out of fear of the people that conspired to kill Jesus. They are afraid that they will be next.

Into this locked room Jesus appears. They touch Him, feel His wounds, and see Him eat, all to reassure them that He is not a ghost or a spirit, but the Lord risen in the flesh. And then, after His followers are convinced that He is real, Jesus teaches them. He “opens their minds to understand the Scriptures.” Remember that at this time, Scriptures refers to the books of the law, the prophets and the psalms, much of what we refer to as the Old Testament. Jesus shows them that He is the fulfillment of all the prophecy of a Messiah, one who would lead God’s chosen people from bondage and enslavement.

Throughout the history of Israel, there is a repeated cycle. The people stray from God’s word, a slow descent into Hell. And only when they reach bottom, as slaves, lost in the wilderness, wanderers, and exiles, do they remember who they are and turn back to God, only to have it start all over again. Jesus comes to break that cycle of repeated sin.

These appearances of Jesus to His disciples, culminating in Pentecost, are to give them faith and courage. By rising from the dead Jesus validates all that He claimed

about Himself. Peter is so emboldened by the experience that he goes to the temple to preach to the very people he was hiding from only a few weeks before. He refers to Jesus in terms normally reserved for God, “The Author of Life,” “The Holy and Righteous One.” And although Peter reminds them that they killed the servant of God, he does not dwell on that point, he is not there to cast blame or condemn. He is there to preach repentance in the Lord’s name, that God may forgive, and wipe away all their sins.

Boldness is the willingness to take risks in the service of what truly matters. It means to be courageous, speaking or acting even though doing so may be dangerous. Holy boldness, of the type shown by Peter, is what is asked of us.

It sounds strange to tell Americans that they need to be bold and brash. There was a time when those characteristics defined Americans. There was a time when the easiest way to get an American to do something, was to tell him it couldn’t be done. But our society had changed much in the past twenty or thirty years. No longer do we celebrate the rugged individual. Now we are told to conform, to be quiet while the world celebrates the most extreme of disordered beliefs, and elevates them to the mainstream. American society has become something of a bully and we have become accustomed to giving the bully what it wants. The problem with this is that the bully always wants more; in fact the bully wants it all.

Monsignor Charles Pope puts it this way, “the world (and the Devil himself) (asks) us to surrender our dignity, to make compromises, and to give way to sin. So easily we surrender our serenity to a world that provokes anxiety and anger; we surrender our chastity to a world that exults lust; we give over our generosity to a world that instills a fear that makes us hoard; we hand over our prophecy to a world that demands our silence; we neglect our souls and hand over its care to a world that demands we be fixated on the body, on good looks, and endless obsession with our health; we hand

over our prayer and the celebration of the sacraments to a world that demands all our time.”

My brothers and sisters it is up to us to be bold enough to stand up and say no, we have given up enough, and we want it back. It will not be easy. We will have to fight to gain back what we gave up so willingly. It is not easy to be bold when society has taught us to be timid. One of the greatest crimes one can commit in the America of today is to offend someone, or to hurt their feelings.

And this sentiment has even begun to infect the Church. Many scholars, theologians, and historians point to an upcoming schism in the Church unlike any she has seen in her two thousand year history. We see some bishops promoting ideas that are directly contrary to the teachings of the Church such as blessing same sex unions, admitting non Catholics to receive the Eucharist, and confusing the faithful by giving the Eucharist to so-called Catholic politicians who openly support the intrinsic evil of abortion.

Last month one conference of Catholic bishops, not here in America, released a so-called “fundamental text” that says in part, “there is no one truth of the religious, moral, and political world, and no one form of thought that can lay claim to ultimate authority.” This fundamental text will guide this Conference in their discussions regarding how the Church should change her message.

The sad truth is that the message of Christ is offensive to a great many people. The idea that Jesus is the Messiah, come to lead us from the slavery of sin and the bondage of death, is offensive not only to the Jewish people, but also to Muslims, atheists, secularists and a whole host of others. The idea that God can forgive any sin, if the sinner is truly repentant is also offensive to many people.

For example, Rudolph Höss was the first commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, located in Poland during World War II. It is estimated that he oversaw the murder of more than a million people. Think about that for a moment, a million people, more than 33 times the number of people killed on 9/11.

After the war Höss was tried for war crimes in Warsaw and sentenced to death. He was imprisoned in solitary confinement in the castle in the city of Krakow, where he waited for his execution. From his prison cell he could hear the bells of a church and he began to remember the faith he was raised in as a child but had long since abandoned. He called for a German-speaking priest. The local Jesuit provincial Fr. Ladislav Lohn was sent to him. Fr. Lohn heard the prisoner's confession and gave him absolution. Höss was reconciled to God and received Holy Communion. Four days before sentence was carried out, Rudolph Höss wrote:

“My conscience compels me to make the following declaration. In the solitude of my prison cell I have come to the bitter recognition that I have sinned gravely against humanity. As Commandant of Auschwitz I was responsible for carrying out part of the cruel plans of the 'Third Reich' for human destruction. In so doing I have inflicted terrible wounds on humanity. I caused unspeakable suffering for the Polish people in particular. I am to pay for this with my life. May the Lord God forgive one day what I have done.”

The idea that someone like Rudolph Höss, whom all the world viewed as a depraved monster, could be reconciled to God and afforded the opportunity of Heaven, is offensive to some people's sense of justice who would like to think of him as burning in Hell for all eternity. But repentance, and forgiveness, is the message we are called to bear witness to with our words and actions. Even, or perhaps especially, when it is unpopular.

I encourage everyone to take the time to learn why the Church teaches what it teaches, so that you may give answer to her critics. We have many opportunities to learn right here in our own parish. We have access to a wonderful resource at [Formed.org](https://www.formed.org). If you are not familiar with this, call the office for details.

Cultivate holy boldness, learn from Saint Peter. Go out and defend the Church, say no to the bully and stop our slow descent into Hell. But learn also from Saint John the Apostle. His letter we heard today bears witness to the faith with love and charity and mutual respect. This is how we can speak to those who disagree with us without alienating them.

But we must speak to them. We must stand up and fight for what is ours. Do not let the world and the devil steal from you. Be bold, take risks, for the message of Jesus is what truly matters. Fear God, honor the King of Kings, and be brave.

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