

**Homily – Mark 16: 1-8/ John 20: 1-9**  
**Easter Vigil/ Easter Sunday**  
**3 / 4 April 2021, Soeey**

---

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

A very Happy Easter to all of you dear brothers and sisters.

Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin was a very powerful Russian communist leader who had taken part in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. He was the editor of the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and was a full member of the Politburo. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly of Communists. The subject was atheism. Addressing the crowd, he attacked Christianity, hurling insults and arguments against it. When he had finished, he looked out at the audience. "Are there any questions?" he demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium. Then one man stood up, approached the platform and mounted the lectern. After surveying the crowd, he shouted the ancient greeting of the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" The crowd stood up and shouted in a thundering voice: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!" Amazed and dejected, Bukharin left the stage in silence.

Well! Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Catholic Church and I see three reasons for the same.

First of all, the Resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian Faith. It is the greatest of the miracles, for it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul in 1st Corinthians 15/14 writes: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your Faith is in vain”.

Secondly, Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies...” (Jn 11:25-26).

And thirdly, Easter is a feast which gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows and tears. It reminds us that life is worth living.

The late Catholic Archbishop of Hartford, John Whealon, had undergone cancer surgery resulting in a permanent colostomy when he wrote these very personal words in one of his last Easter messages:

"I am now a member of an association of people who have been wounded by cancer. And as you know, that association has as its symbol the phoenix, a bird of Egyptian mythology. The Greek poet Hesiod, who lived eight centuries before Jesus was born, wrote about this legendary bird in his poetry. When the bird felt its death was near, it would fly off to Phoenicia, build a nest of aromatic wood and set itself on fire. When the bird was consumed by the flames, a new phoenix sprang forth from the ashes. Thus, dear friends, he said: the phoenix symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and life after death.

It sums up the Easter message perfectly. Jesus gave up His life, and from the grave He was raised to life again on the third day. New life rises from the ashes of death. Archbishop Whealon went on to his conclusion saying: Today we are celebrating Christ's victory over the grave, the gift of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus.

That is why the phoenix bird, one of the earliest symbols of the Risen Christ, also symbolizes our daily rising to new life. Every day, like the phoenix, we rise from the ashes of sin and guilt and are refreshed and renewed by our living Lord and Savior with His forgiveness, and the

assurance that He still loves us and will continue to give us the strength we need."

Well! Archbishop John Whealon could have lived in a gloomy tomb of self-pity, hopeless defeat, and chronic sadness, but his faith in the Risen Lord opened his eyes to new visions of life.

Remember dear friends! Each time we continue to hope – even when our hope seems unanswered – we share in the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

Even when the whole world, as of now, is grappling with these testing and uncertain moments caused by Corona Virus, even when we are all in fear of what tomorrow is going to bring us, of not knowing if we will be able to withstand the devastating impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, we are asked to turn to the Risen Lord who gives us hope and stay assured that we are not alone in all of these. Jesus the Risen Lord who underwent the most excruciating pain for love of us is with us, each and every moment of our lives.

And so, nothing can and nothing should destroy us – not pain, not sin, not rejection, not the pandemic nor death –

because Christ has conquered all these, and so, we too can conquer them if we put our Faith in Him. And so today, as Reinhold Niebuhr puts it, we need to pray for the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference. And with St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland, we should be able to say and pray with conviction even in the midst of this malady, this current pandemic:

“Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ within me, never to part.” God bless you all, **Amen.**

**Fr. Yashin**