EASTER SUNDAY (April 24) ACTS 10:34, 37-43; COL 3:1-4; JOHN 20: 1-9

HAPPY EASTER TO EVERYONE!

Egyptian pyramids are world-famous as one of the "seven Wonders" of the world. But they are actually gigantic tombs containing the mummified bodies of Egyptian Pharaohs. Westminster Abby is famous and thousands visit it because the dead bodies of famous writers, philosophers and politicians are entombed there. But there is a Shrine of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and pilgrims from all over the world visit a tomb there which is empty with a note at its entrance which says, "He *is not here*." It is famous because Jesus Christ who was once buried there rose from the dead, leaving an empty tomb as he had told his disciples he would. Thus, he worked the most important miracle in his life, defying the laws of nature and proving that he is God. We rejoice at this great and unique event by celebrating Easter.

Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Church. "Easter" literally means "the feast of fresh flowers." We celebrate it with pride and jubilation for three reasons.

1) The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian faith. The Resurrection is the greatest of the miracles--it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: *"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your faith is in vain… (I Cor 15: 14,…)* Without the Resurrection, Jesus would have remained forever a good person who met a tragic end. People would remember some of his teachings and a handful of people might try to live according to them. All the basic doctrines of Christianity are founded on the truth of the Resurrection**.** *"Jesus is Lord, he is risen"* (Rom 10: 9) was the central theme of the *kerygma* (or 'preaching') of the apostles. There is a story of two women who stood before Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. One asked, "Why can't we build structures like this anymore?" Her friend answered, "The people who built this had faith. Today we have only opinions. And you can't build a cathedral with opinions."

2) 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). Christ will raise us up on the last day, but it is also true, in a sense, that we have already risen with Christ. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, our Christian life is already a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1002, #1003, p. 261).

3) 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. It is our belief in the real presence of the risen Jesus that gives meaning to our personal, as well as to our

common, prayers. Our trust in the all-pervading presence of the risen Lord gives us strength to fight against temptations and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears. The prayer of St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland reads: "Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ within me, never to part."

The resurrection of Jesus had certain special features. First, Jesus prophesied it as a sign of his divinity. *"Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again"* (Jn 2: 19). Second, the founder of no other religion has an empty tomb as Jesus has. We see the fulfillment of Christ's promise in the empty cross and the empty tomb. The angel said to the women at Jesus' tomb: *"Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here: he has been raised"* (Luke 24: 5-6). The third special feature is the initial disbelief of Jesus' own disciples in his resurrection in spite of his repeated apparitions. This serves as a strong proof of his resurrection. It explains why the apostles started preaching the resurrected Christ only after receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. Today's gospel explains the empty-tomb resurrection experience of Mary Magdalene, Peter and John. Mary Magdalene proclaims her personal experience: *"I have seen the Lord*."

Easter reminds us that every Good Friday in our lives will have an Easter Sunday, and that Jesus will let us share the power of his resurrection. Each time we display our love of others, we share in the resurrection. Each time we face a betrayal of trust, we share in the resurrection of Jesus. Each time we fail in our attempts to ward off temptations – but keep on trying to overcome them – we share in the resurrection. Each time we continue to hope – even when our hope seems unanswered – we share in the power of Jesus' resurrection. In short, the message of Easter is that nothing can destroy us – not pain, sin, rejection or death – because Christ has conquered all these, and we too can conquer them if we put our faith in Him.

(Taken from the Scriptural Homilies)