

Easter 2021

Easter began in emptiness. We are so familiar with the Resurrection story and the eventual appearances of the risen Jesus to His disciples that we might skip over this first and essential fact ... that Easter began in emptiness. The most obvious emptiness, of course, was the empty tomb. The women come to complete the Jewish burial rites for their friend, interrupted by the sunset that began the weekly Sabbath observance on Friday evening – but this was a Friday they could never forget. To the crowds, it was just the end of one more failed Messiah Who was going to change the world and ended up on a Roman cross. But to those who had believed in Him, and seen His wisdom, His compassion, His love, this death was more than just the loss of a loved one ... it shook their trust in God to the core, emptying out their hopes.

The darkness of that early morning walk to the burial places must have surely matched their mood ... empty hearts, empty thoughts, on their way to fulfill some rituals that must also have seemed empty to them. What is the point, really, when everything leads to that same emptiness in the end, when love and kindness and faith are finally silenced for the best of people, just the same as for the worst?

And then, a fresh shock ... His body gone, an emptied grave. This was surely going too far, excessively cruel. Hadn't His accusers won? Was it not enough to have crucified their Master, must they also defile His grave, leaving empty burial cloths behind?

There is still much emptiness in the world this night / day. The absence of peace, the disregard for human life and respect, the hunger of children, the loneliness of the forgotten, the violence of terror and crime, the distractions of modern life that so easily make us indifferent to others ... against the sufferings of a troubled humanity, what can a vacant tomb signify other than more emptiness? We sing the Church's "Alleluia," but many wonder – what really has changed? We profess that Christ's grave was empty on Easter morning; but even so, a tomb awaits each of us, somewhere, sometime. Does Easter really matter after all these years?

It is good to remember that Easter began in emptiness – symbolized at the Easter Vigil by beginning in darkness, where only the light of the Paschal Candle, the Christ Light, burns, the very darkness around it making that light all the more welcome. In the same way, it is the very emptiness we might bring to Easter that opens us to its joy ... for God can speak to listening ears, can satisfy hungry hearts, can fill empty hopes with a joy beyond all sorrow and a life beyond death. Every suffering and struggle we can name find their place, and their healing, in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus.

It is worth remembering that no other faith and no other philosophy does what we are gathered here to do. Many groups commemorate the birth of their founder; listen to their central teachings; perhaps even remember their leader's death. But only Christians celebrate the **Resurrection**, the proclamation that death itself has been redeemed, reclaimed by God and transformed into the hope of eternal life. For those who say the Risen Christ, the Resurrection was just as real, just as undeniable, and just as mysterious as the Cross had been. Both of them really happened. With time, they came to know that the grave of Jesus was emptied, not by vengeance, but by Mercy; not by hatred, but by victorious Love. They believed first, and then saw their Risen Lord.

Easter began in emptiness, but that tomb was not robbed ... it was simply left behind, a temporary pause succeeded by an endless Life – just as it will be for us. We too believe first, awaiting that moment when we, too, will see the risen Lord. ***Bring whatever emptiness you know, and let the Light of the World illumine the darkness, fill the void, and give new birth to a hope that does not disappoint.*** Easter begins in emptiness, but leads us to the fullness of life. For as Pope Benedict once put it so perfectly ... we do not simply remember that Jesus was ... we rejoice that He IS.