

CHRIST HAS RISEN! CHRIST LIVES!

Easter Sunday
March 26, 1978

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-9

How I would love to be able to speak to you with more than my own words so that I could proclaim the mystery of grace that we celebrate today and thus allow this mystery to penetrate the hearts of all those persons who are listening to me! How much I desire to say to you, with profound faith and hope and Christian joy: Happy Easter! Since last night this has become the greeting among Christians.

The Second Vatican Council states: *Holy Mother Church believes that it is for her to celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once, each week, on the day which she has called the Lord's Day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at Easter, the most solemn of all feasts* (a). The Church carries in the depth of her soul the reality of the resurrection and therefore she not only celebrates the solemn feast of Easter today but every eight days she calls her children to the altar to celebrate once again the feast of Easter. Every Sunday is a little Easter but today is the greatest feast of the year, the great celebration of Easter, the feast of the Lord's resurrection.

The etymology of the word *Easter* is difficult to translate but essentially the meaning that this word attempts to convey is the fact that Jesus has passed from death to life. As we stand before the empty grave of Jesus, we can preach the words of Saint Paul and apply those words only to Jesus: *He went about doing good* (b). God was with Jesus and therefore he has raised up Jesus. Jesus is the only person whose tomb can be venerated --- but we must remember that we venerate an empty tomb. When we speak about the great figures of history we know that it is an honor to visit the graves where their bodies have returned to dust. But when we speak about the Son of Man, Christ, we can only venerate his empty grave. How many pilgrims in the Holy Land need to be reminded of the fact that they are venerating an empty grave! And that, brothers and sisters, is the feast of today.

I want to present you with three ideas from the readings: (1) looking at Jesus we see that *God anointed Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit and God was with him* (c); (2) looking at the Church that completes the work of Jesus in the world we see that the Church is charged with proclaiming this good news to all the ends of the earth and she proclaims good news all the days of her life; (3) looking at ourselves, we pose this question: What is our response to all of this? We have a responsibility to believe in the Redeemer who died but has now been raised to new life

Anointed by God with the Power of the Holy Spirit. God is with Him

In this morning's first reading Saint Peter gives us a beautiful synthesis. Saint Peter is in the process of a conversion. The Jewish man, Peter, is going to hear that Christ not only died for the Jews but for all people. Peter has a vision of unclean animals and is ordered to eat the meat of these animals. He responds: *Certainly not, sir. For never have I eaten anything profane or unclean* (d). But the voice of the Spirit responds: *What God has made clean, you are not to call profane. Because Christ, the Son of God, died for all people, there is no distinction among persons.* There is no reason for religious, political or social classes, for everyone is sister and brother. We are all called to salvation. The Spirit continues: *There are three men here looking for you. So get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them* (e). Peter goes and discovers that the Gentile, Cornelius, had the same vision. In the presence of this non-Jewish, Gentile family, Peter pronounces the famous discourse that we read this morning.

Peter proclaimed: *In truth, I see that God shows no partiality* (f). Jesus has come for all people. Peter then begins to explain the main theme of the preaching of the Apostles and the first Christians, namely, that Christ died for all people. This Christ was also anointed by God and God was with him and thus all people are saved. This should be the way we think today. My sisters and brothers, as we behold the Risen Christ our faith should be filled with gratitude and delight and hope. We ought to say: *You are the God who became man and because of your love for humankind you were not horrified to hide your grandeur as God and pass through this world as a man like every other man. You made no distinction between yourself and other men. In fact, they thought you were an evildoer and you died like a common thief on the cross. They buried you on Calvary, in the garbage dump of the crucified. But now, from the garbage dump, from the profound depths of that place where the dead awaited you, the Divine Resurrected One appears as One who has truly been anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit.* (g)

The Incarnation of Christ is here where he is crowned. The child that the Virgin held in her arms; the child that she embraced and nursed; the child that others, his enemies, felt free to beat and spit upon --- this child was the flesh of God. God was there, with him, incarnated in Jesus. The glory of the resurrection was necessary so that people could come to understand that in the humiliated and crucified Christ, in the Christ who became man for us, in the Christ who felt the tiredness and anguish of every other man, in this Christ is hidden the dignity of God. Now we see this God! We see this God as the glory of God transforms the body of Jesus. We see this God in Jesus' appearance, for his whole being seems to resemble the bright sun rather than some mortal human being. We see this God and are able to understand the words of Saint Paul: *What was sown in ignominy is reaped in glorification; what was sown in a mortal tomb and seen as death is reaped in glorious and immortal resurrection and will never die again* (h). Death will have no dominion over him and the eternal youth, the eternal springtime and the One who is life itself will no longer experience decline or illness but only the fullness of joy and happiness.

You, men and women who live today, you who are anguished and feel hopeless when confronted by so many problems, you who seek paradise here in this world, do not look for this paradise here but look for it in the Risen Christ. Let us empty ourselves of our concerns, anxieties and problems and place all of this before the Lord. Let us place all our hope in the Lord. Christ has become all things for all people and is the source of our joy. The One anointed by the Spirit of God, in his human and glorious dimensions, holds the answer for all

humankind. My sisters and brothers, let us not doubt Saint Paul's words that were spoken to us on Good Friday as we stood before the humiliated and crucified Jesus for in this way we are able to say: *With confidence let us draw near to the throne of grace, the throne of the Almighty, the throne of happiness of and joy.*(i) Christ is the fountain that satisfies every kind of thirst, the thirst of all those who draw near to him with faith.

This Jesus who went about doing good (j) and in whom God dwelt in all fullness, this Jesus is not only a moral example that ought to be followed. My sisters and brothers, I want to highlight this morning the theological aspect of all of this. This Jesus is a sacrament of the divine. He is *the Way, the Truth and the Life* (k). Only those who walk with him will find salvation. Indeed, Jesus came precisely for this reason, to give salvation to all people.

This salvation that today we so much desire and that in Latin America takes on the very suggestive name of liberation can very easily be confused with other earthly redemptions. Look at how often the Church is misunderstood and seen as one who is communist and subversive! Look at how the Church is seen as one who can offer nothing more than political, economic or social liberation! Yes, the Church is interested in these aspects of liberation because Jesus would not be the Redeemer if he had not been concerned about feeding the multitudes who were hungry, if he had not restored the sight of those were blind, if he did not feel anguish for the crowds who felt as though no one loved them or wanted to help them. Human development has political and social dimensions that are also concerns for Christianity. Redemption would not be complete if it did not take into consideration these dimensions of Christ who wanted to present himself as an example of one who was oppressed by a powerful Empire, oppressed by a class of leaders who wanted to shatter his fame and honor and who ultimately crucified him.

But Jesus offers us more than this. If Jesus could only offer us a paradise in this world then he would have had nothing to offer the good thief who died with him on the afternoon of Good Friday. (l) Even though Jesus died as a victim of the system and died in a way that was appropriate for those who were to be executed, yet Jesus still offers us words of liberation. Jesus does not speak to us about a utopia or some fantasy nor does Jesus speak to us with words of sterile consolation. In reality Jesus is the King of glory who offers humankind happiness, not only in this world, but primarily happiness in heaven. My sisters and brothers, this does not allow us to detach ourselves from the realities of this world in the sense of alienation from these realities. Rather, because of Jesus' resurrection, we are invited to instill in the world a sense of glory and joy. Jesus' resurrection also speaks to the institutions of this world, the powerful and the the governments of this world, those who suffer and are oppressed in this world and tells them that paradise and heaven and glory must also become realities in this world. Jesus became a part of the history of this world where he was able to present himself in a glorified way, in a way that reflected the way he would be in eternity. But yes, he did this while he was present in the history of humankind.

My sisters and brothers, this, then, is authentic liberation. This is the liberation that concerns the Church and it is her concern because so many people are enslaved in such unworthy ways. But the liberation that is proclaimed by the Church is not a liberation that is limited by time and space or limited to this world. Rather the Church proclaims a full and Christian liberation that is offered to us by the person of Jesus. There is no more beautiful example of a free person or one who is independent of and above all the systems of the earth than Jesus who presents himself to the world as autonomous and independent even though he is part of this group of persons who live in the world, this group of persons called humanity.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, Christ knows that his redemption has not ended with this event of the resurrection. Redemption implies something that is greater.

The Church completes Jesus work in the world

My second thought this morning is to reflect on and look upon this Church of Jesus Christ with happiness and gratitude and faith. . My sisters and brothers, each time that I speak about the Church, I do so with a sense of making reparation. In these days the Church is greatly offended and seen as simply a human institution. Many slanderous accusations are made against her.

Yet it is in light of the Risen Christ that the Church presents the patient face of Christ, a face that is still exposed to spit and the lashes and the defamation of enemies. But remember that within her, in her heart, the Church bears the hope and the great mission of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This was spoken about in today's reading when Peter says: *He [Jesus] commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead* (m).

Not everyone saw the Risen Lord and we also have not seen the risen Christ. It is for this reason that many people laugh at us: *Poor dreamers! They believe in a risen person who never existed.* But Saint Peter tells us today: *but to those who, according to God's eternal plan have been chosen to continue the heritage of the Old Testament prophets, to those eye witnesses he has given the mission of proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord. All those who believe in him will receive forgiveness of sin through his name* (n). As St Paul says: *Jesus who was put to death for our sins and raised to life to justify us* (o). And as the prophets proclaimed, and the apostles continued proclaiming, Christ's resurrection is evidence of God's omnipotence and marks the break with slavery since all who accept this resurrection and eternal life will be freed from their sins.

The Church is charged with bringing this message of reconciliation to the whole world and charged with preaching this message of hope to all people. In light of this mission the Church is very much concerned about proclaiming the reality of the resurrection.

Notice that today's three readings are taken from the New Testament: the first from the Acts of the Apostles, the second from Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians and the third from the gospel of Saint John. As these apostles reflected with the primitive communities on Jesus' resurrection, they were aware of the slanders and the defamations made against the Risen One. It is for this reason that their preaching is apologetic, that is, they attempt to prove that Christ has truly risen and that his resurrection is the apologetic proof of their preaching. Saint Paul says: *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith* (p). If Christ did not die and has not been raised then we are preaching lies and we have deceived people for centuries.

My sisters and brothers, there are two facts that the contemporaries of Apostles and the contemporaries of the events of Good Friday have been unable to refute: the empty tomb and the undeniable testimony of those who saw and ate with the Risen Jesus. Peter tells us: *This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead* (q). At the end of all of this, my sisters and brothers, some reliable witnesses say: *We have seen the Lord* (r). A spectacular event is presented to all people, even the incredulous

and the enemies of Jesus --- there is the empty tomb! The soldiers of Pontius Pilate were fearful and said that the followers of Jesus had robbed his body. After all these soldiers represented authority in Jerusalem and surely they would be able to convince all the households and dwellings of the truth of their words. But where is he? Throughout the centuries no one could deny the fact that the tomb was empty and that the witnesses fearlessly preached in the light of day that they had eaten and drank with him. No one was able to hold these facts up to their faces and say: *Liars! You are deceived!* Rather the community continued to grow in this admirable faith which we share today: the faith of the Risen One, a faith that is not only grounded on historical events but is also grounded on the Word of God that proclaimed and fulfilled the great event of the Resurrection.

This would be the great mission of the Church, to bring this news, this good news that I have the honor of proclaiming this morning: *Christ has risen! Christ lives!* My Christian sisters and brothers, we are followers of a man-redeemer who died but has been raised and lives anew; we are followers of one who will die no more.

Ah! If only the Christian community lived the joy and hope of this sublime message there would be no sorrow in the world! Even the most unbearable anxieties and the seemingly unsolvable problems would discover here the serenity of Holy Saturday, the serenity of the empty tomb that proclaims calmness and not pessimism. Jesus said that he was going to rise. Thus, like Mary, filled with hope, we awaited here last night in this Cathedral and then we celebrated the beautiful liturgy of the Easter Vigil. As the darkness of night appeared, the Paschal Candle was lighted: *He is risen!* Everyone then lighted their candles, and believing in this light of Christ we became light in the darkness. Joy filled the air and the Paschal Candle continued to give light to the night until the dawning of the new day.

On this night in history when we experience so much intrigue, so many shadows and sins, so many crimes that seem to remain hidden, so many people who have disappeared and it seems that they will never be found... on this night the Church gives light to the darkness. Truth will shine forth! Justice will shine forth! The Lord will return and everyone will be given their just reward or punishment! The Church's mission is to proclaim this living presence of the Risen One.

Furthermore, my sisters and brothers, the mission of the Church implies that we continue to share the divine life that Jesus brought to the world. During this Holy Week, how many people have discovered pardon, peace and joy! How many people have found the opened treasures of redemption! Recently we read these beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah: *You who are thirsty, you who seek to satisfy your thirst with the pleasures of the flesh and the vices of this world... all you who are thirsty, come to the water!* (s). You, who are thirsty, come to this fountain. Here, in the heart of his Church, Christ is offering you redemption, joy, hope and life!

My sisters and brothers, this morning I want us to rejoice as an Archdiocesan Church because if we analyze the events of this Holy Week within the framework of the celebration of the resurrection of 1978, we discover that there are many communities that truly lived the spirit of this Holy Week. Some of these celebrations took place in communities where there is a resident priest and so I want to thank my beloved brother priests. I thank not only the pastors who are obliged to minister in their parishes but I also thank those priests who are not involved in parish ministry but put aside their ordinary daily work and went to those

communities where there are no priests --- villages and towns where because of this generous collaboration the people were able to celebrate this Holy Week with the presence of a priest.

I also think of the many communities where no priest was able to be present but where some seminarians, religious women and lay people (humble *campesinos*, professionals, university students, professors) assumed the role of leader of the Word of God. All of these people represent a well equipped team that went out to lead the Holy Week celebrations in so many towns and villages. Thanks to the initiative that was taken by the Pastoral Commission, a booklet was published to assist those persons who led the community in the celebration of Holy Week. With joy and admiration we have seen the marvelous works of the Holy Spirit, especially in those lay people and religious women who lived their priesthood in the midst of those communities without a resident priest and enabled these people to experience the Passover of the Lord. Perhaps today they are listening to us on the radio and reflecting with us on this crowning feast of Holy Week.

I cannot forget to speak about those who were able to take an honest vacation during this Holy Week. For these people there is no other time during the year to relax and so in a spirit of piety they traveled to their places of rest. May God continue to bless you.

We are also mindful of the fact that for many people this has been a time for all kinds of disorders and vice and orgies. Who has not listened to the testimony of young people, and not only young people but also of adults, who believe that the flesh is man's idol? Look at how they make Holy Week a time for drunkenness and gluttony, a time for licentiousness and all forms of intoxication! My sisters and brothers, I pray that when these people return from these unworthy vacations where there was no rest but only distortions of their own personality... I pray that these people will discover the mercy and the forgiveness of God. For God does not desire the death of sinners but rather desires their repentance and conversion.

We also pray for those who during this Holy Week continued the intrigue and the silence. We pray for those who took advantage of these days to plot new violence and new ways to offend our sisters and brothers --- May God forgive these people and call them to conversion.

I reflect here, my sisters and brothers, on this mission of the Church to preach Jesus' redemption that reaches its high point during Holy Week, to those humble and often nameless servants --- persons who perhaps against their conscience but because of duty and obligation had to continue their service. These are the hidden servants (some of whom may have offended God) who lived this week honestly in service of others. Who thinks of them? Who thinks of the humble servant, the housemaids, those who work in the telephone and telegraph office? Who thinks of all these humble servants? My sisters and brothers, these people are too numerous to mention here but we pray that the Lord will continue to bless their spirit of service so that each one of them might desire to sanctify their own vocation and work and thus make themselves holy and pleasing to God.

This, then, is the Church that preaches redemption, the resurrection and joy. The Church wants to preach these realities to all people. For this reason I said at the beginning of this homily that I wish someone could provide me with words that are not simply broadcast through the miracle of radio, but words that enable me to place in the hearts of every person the grace of God's Spirit so that every heart could hear the call of this Easter day --- the call to live with the joy of one who has been redeemed. How should we respond to this call?

Our responsibility to believe in a Redeemer who died but has been raised to new life

My sisters and brothers, my third point is taken from the words that Saint Paul spoke to us today: *Everyone who is baptized bears the mark of Jesus' death and resurrection.* Last night here in the cathedral we lived the reality of our baptism that is sealed by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. This event was not only proclaimed here, but wherever the Easter Vigil was celebrated. Together with the Risen Christ we listen today to our great responsibility: *If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above... not what is on earth* (t).

Let us truly understand these words. Saint Paul is not proposing some dichotomy, as though the things of this earth had no value and therefore we had to live in conformity with the realities of this earth and wait for the things that are above. If we want to understand these words we have to read the verses before today's reading, (u) for there we discover that Paul is correcting a religious error that led some of the Colossians to believe that some powers from above had dominated them and that therefore they had to flee from these powers that were symbols of the sin and the evil of the earth. Thus because of a misunderstanding of these things that are above, they also separated themselves from the things of this world.

Here Saint Paul is teaching the people that the resurrection of Christ is able to clarify these misunderstandings. He says that such spirits do not exist and that we must be focused on the King of Glory who became man and redeemed humankind. Therefore, we must seek what is above. In other words, we must seek the things that Jesus has brought us, the things that Jesus, incarnate and living in history, has placed in our history, the seeds of those heavenly things. To live the realities of above this morning, means that we live in justice and peace and love, that we respect human rights and respect the dignity of our sisters and brothers. In no way are we told to disregard or be unconcerned about the things of this world. Rather we must use the things of this world with the criteria of heavenly justice.

My sisters and brothers, I want to conclude by reading these precious words of the Second Vatican Council: *Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, He taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice. Appointed Lord by His resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of His Holy Spirit, arousing not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact animating, purifying and strengthening those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human and strives to render the whole earth submissive to this goal* (v). In other words, the resurrection is also a message of liberation for the things of the world.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, the Church cannot be deaf or mute before the entreaty of millions of persons who cry out for liberation, persons oppressed by a thousand slaveries. But the Church speaks to them about the true liberty that they must seek: a freedom that Christ began on earth when he rose and burst the chains of sin and death and hell. It is to be like Christ, free of sin, to be truly free with true liberation. Those who put their faith in the Risen One and work for a more just world, who protest against the injustices of the present system, against the abuses of unjust authorities, against the wrongfulness of humans exploiting humans --- all those who begin their struggle with the resurrection of the great Liberator, they alone are authentic Christians.

Therefore, the resurrection must give people courage and integrity. Instead of being cowards, Christians must follow Jesus' example who was willing to confront Pilate and Herod and his persecutors. With the serenity of the Lamb they are led to the slaughter but in the graves of martyrdom they await the hour when God will glorify them. That *hour* is not decided by men and women, rather it is the *hour* of God who is the only One who can save us. Yes, waiting for Christ and trusting in Christ is the secret of true liberation.

My sisters and brothers, finally I want to announce that as we continue this celebration we are going to confer upon one of our seminarians, Rafael Edgardo Urrutia Herrera, the ministry of acolyte. He is in his last year of theological studies and very soon we will ordain him a priest. It has also been suggested that today when we pause to remember those who have died, that we remember in a special way those who have died on the 17th of March both here and in Apopa.¹ With our contributions, let us help those who were wounded and the family members of those who died. Perhaps the celebrations of Holy Week have made us forget these people. I also want to denounce here the fact that during Holy Week a Jesuit was refused entrance into our country.

My sisters and brothers, despite the difficulties and trials of the Church, yet with the joy of a people who see new seeds of vocations springing forth in our midst, we confer upon our beloved brother Rafael Edgardo Urrutia Herrera, soon to be ordained a priest, the ministry of acolyte. Let us now stand as we begin this ceremony.

¹ Reference to the massacre, already denounced in the homily of 19 March 1978, which left 8 campesinos dead, 7 disappeared and 40 wounded. See "Solidaridad", *Orientación*, 2 April 1978.

Margin References (a) SC 102: (b) Ac 10,38: (c) Ac 10,38: (d) Ac 10,9-15: (e) Ac 10,19-22: (f) Ac 10,34-36: (g) Ac 10,38: (h) 1Cor 15,42-44: (i) Hb 4,16: (j) Ac 10,38: (k) Jn 14,6: (l) Lk 23,43: (m) Ac 10,42: (n) Ac 10,42-43: (o) Rm 4,25: (p) 1Cor 15,17-19: (q) Ac 10,41: (r) Mt 27,62-66: (s) Is 55,1: (t) Col 3,1: (u) Col 2,16-19: (v) GS 38.