

## Easter – C

Jesus Christ is risen! Indeed, he is truly risen! This is the heart of our faith; it's why we call ourselves Christians – because we believe that Jesus Christ, who died on a cross and was buried in a tomb, rose from the dead on the third day.

And this should be cause for rejoicing. The long season of Lent is now over. And the weather throughout this past Lenten season really seemed to fit with this somber, penitential season – generally cold, cloudy, gloomy, with the occasional break for a little relief. And although throughout this past Lent I keep thinking and saying that finally we are on the cusp of good weather, I think I can fairly confidently say that now that Easter is here, we really on the cusp of good weather. So it's like the weather is matching our liturgical seasons – one more reason to rejoice.

But perhaps you may not feel like rejoicing. Perhaps you know that you should, because that is what our faith urges us to do; maybe

you will even try to pretend that you are rejoicing, but maybe you just don't really feel it. But I am here to remind everyone that, even though today or at this point in your life you may not really feel like rejoicing, Jesus' Resurrection from the dead is indeed a cause for rejoicing and for hope. And hope often seems to be in short supply. I have said in my homilies, and I say it again now, that we are living in a time and place of prosperity and comfort and abundance unprecedented in human history. But in spite of this, it seems that there are always many headwinds against the virtue of hope. And that's because material prosperity, comfort, and abundance in and of themselves really don't produce virtues like joy or hope. Certainly they can make us feel better, at least for a time; they can take the edge off of pain and suffering, and of course, they may not be bad things in themselves. But they are incapable of creating or giving us true and abiding joy and hope. We live in a fallen, imperfect world, marked by sin and suffering, and material things cannot erase that reality.

Here are some of the big sources of grief, sorrow, and anxiety in our society that I at least hear a lot about, not necessarily in any kind of order.

A big one that I hear about is what is going on in our country. Regardless of one's politics, there always seems to be the sense that things are not really going in the right direction, that things are getting worse rather than better. Certainly, you might feel more positive or negative, depending on your politics. If your candidate or party won the most recent elections, you might think things are looking up. If not, you might feel the opposite. In response to this, let me say that no politician or political party is ever going to create the perfect society or nation on earth. Yes, they have an important role to play, and they can have a significant impact on our lives, but I think we as a society ascribe to politicians a greater role and influence than they really merit. Some things will get better, some will get worse, maybe in greater or lesser degrees – and I'm not

saying that they're all equal and it doesn't really matter what politicians do – but what I'm saying is that we should stop looking to politics as the be-all and end-all in life and stop letting it have the influence on our lives that it currently has. Again, it's important, it has its place, but it's not everything. Politicians and political movements come and go. Even kingdoms and nations come and go. The moment in time in which we live might seem like the most important, the most significant, the most dire, whatever, but it will be succeeded by another age. We barely remember the candidates for president from even a few election cycles ago, let alone decades ago, even though at the time they would have dominated the news cycle.

The same could be said for the economy, or the ups and downs of the stock market. There are always going to be ups and downs in any economy. I know in my own life there have been, and before I was alive there were, and in the future I have no doubt there will be

others. Again, let's not put our hope in politicians, or the stock market, or economic cycles. They fluctuate; they change; they cannot create a perfect world and bring about lasting happiness.

Social change also produces a lot of anxiety. And we are certainly living in an age of great social change. Speaking for my own life – now over 5 decades and counting – I think there has been great social upheaval throughout my whole life – constant social change. Social change has been a part of human history, but I would venture to say that it has accelerated in the last couple hundred years compared to the centuries before that, and that it continues to accelerate; every decade the pace of change seems to go faster. This creates a sense of instability, and it is disorienting and confusing, and produces no little amount of angst and disquiet.

And while politics and the economy can and do affect us, I think social change and upheaval affects even more, and on a more personal level. That's because it filters into and affects family life.

And the health of the family is a barometer of the health of our society. Because society changes so quickly nowadays, strong tensions can arise between generations: they just have a hard time comprehending each other. A big one that I hear about is family division, estranged children and parents, children who have stopped practicing the faith or who have even become hostile to it, and more and more, young people who are growing in their faith whose parents don't practice and consequently don't understand them.

Then there are things like serious health issues and challenges that come from aging. Although we have better health care than ever before, and life expectancy is near its all-time high, physical challenges remain. We still live in the shadow of death, and our bodies still break down over time. Chronic pain and chronic illness, not to mention addictions, are a reality for many, many people.

And then there is the sorrow caused by our own human weakness and sinfulness. Try as we might, it often seems that we fail

to change or improve. We feel that we confess the same sins over and over. We feel ashamed of our sins, but we can't seem to rid ourselves of them. We might struggle to feel God's love, because we wonder how God could love someone who just keeps sinning.

Certainly I have not covered all of the reasons that people struggle to experience joy and hope in their lives. But these are some of the biggest ones. But then why can I stand here and say that we still have reason to rejoice? Here's why: because Jesus Christ rose from the dead one Sunday 2,000 years ago.

But, even if we believe in Jesus' Resurrection, sometimes it can seem so abstract and distant. I would love to be able to flip a switch, or say a key phrase, that would suddenly produce joy and hope in the heart of every person here today. But the virtues of joy and hope do not come about that way. Like the virtue of faith, they start small like a tiny mustard seed. And while we can help cultivate their growth, the growth primarily comes from God. But He *will* make

them grow in us; He is their source and He has an infinite supply of them, and He is not stingy in giving them to us, and what's more, He *desires* to give them to us.

So what is our role then? One, we must ask Him for these virtues. We must not be shy about bringing our needs before him – not just our material needs, but even more importantly, our spiritual needs. If you feel you are lacking in joy and hope, or in any other virtue, ask the Lord to increase them in you.

Second, we must also work on making our hearts a fertile place for these virtues to take root and grow. How can we do this? You might already know the answer to this: through regular, daily prayer, through receiving the sacraments that God has given us through His Church, through Mass on Sundays and holy days. Every day we should start our day with at least a few minutes with the Lord, asking Him to show us how He wants us to use the new day He gives us. Ask Him to direct your thoughts less to yourself that day and

more towards others. Ask him for the help you need that day to do His will as best you can. We can also cultivate the virtues of joy and hope in our hearts by reducing our reliance on the worldly, material things we are so accustomed to turning to, especially when we're struggling with something or having a bad day: things like food and drink, entertainment, the internet, social media, video games – things that are not bad in themselves, but like all material things, can easily be abused or take on too much importance in our lives. And of course, to do our best to stay away from those things that are vices.

Most likely, reducing our reliance on worldly things and vices is going to be a slow, incremental process in which we will have to exercise a lot of patience with ourselves, resisting the discouragement that comes when we don't see quick results or the progress we desire, and we will have to exercise a lot of patience with God, persevering in our prayer, asking Him again and again for the

help that we need. In fact, our whole lives no doubt will be a process of letting God transform our hearts, rooting out the bad, cultivating the good.

Living out our faith need not be, and should not be, an exercise in constantly beating ourselves up for not being perfect. And we should also be realistic about the world that we live in: it is a fallen world; this world is never going to be perfect.

Again, the ultimate reason to have hope despite the imperfect world we live in and despite our imperfect selves that we must live with: Jesus Christ rose from the dead on that Sunday about 2,000 years ago, and in so doing conquered the powers of sin and death. Through His Resurrection, he gives us the promise – and the hope – that He will raise us too from the dead – body and soul – into a new and perfect life, and into a new and perfect world. Jesus will do what no politician, no economic policy, no consumer product, and no medical treatment can ever do: He will bring an end to the pain

and sorrow and suffering of this life – however dark or dire or serious it may be – He will even take away the memory of it – those dark things will one day no longer have power over us or affect us in any way. He will end division, restore peace, heal us from every infirmity. This is the reason for our hope and the reason why we can rejoice even now. Our hope and our joy will not be perfect now, because we still live in this fallen world. But our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the assurance that one day our joy will be complete.

- **April 20, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**