



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

MASS IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

*Jerusalem, Holy Sepulchre
Sunday, 26 March 2000*

“I believe in Jesus Christ . . . conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. . . On the third day he rose again”

1. Following the path of salvation history, as narrated in the Apostles' Creed, my Jubilee Pilgrimage has brought me to the Holy Land. From Nazareth, where Jesus was conceived of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, I have reached Jerusalem, where he “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried”. Here, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, I kneel before the place of his burial: “Behold, the place where they laid him” (*Mk 16:6*).

The tomb is empty. It is a silent witness to the central event of human history: the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. For almost two thousand years the empty tomb has borne witness to the victory of Life over death. With the Apostles and Evangelists, with the Church of every time and place, we too bear witness and proclaim: “Christ is risen! Raised from the dead he will never die again; death no longer has power over him” (cf. *Rom 6:9*).

“Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando; dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus” (Latin Easter Sequence)

Victimae Paschali). The Lord of Life was dead; now he reigns, victorious over death, the source of everlasting life for all who believe.

2. In this, “the Mother of all Churches” (St. John Damascene), I extend warm greetings to His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Ordinaries of the other Catholic Communities, Father Giovanni Battistelli and the Franciscan Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land, as well as the clergy, religious and lay faithful.

With fraternal esteem and affection I greet Patriarch Diodoros of the Greek Orthodox Church and Patriarch Torkom of the Armenian Orthodox Church, the representatives of the Coptic, Syrian and Ethiopian Churches, as well as of the Anglican and Lutheran Communities.

Here, where our Lord Jesus Christ died in order to gather into one the children of God who were scattered (*Jn 11:52*), may the Father of mercies strengthen our desire for unity and peace among all who have received the gift of new life through the saving waters of Baptism.

3. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (*Jn 2:19*).

The Evangelist John tells us that, after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples remembered these words, and they believed (cf. *Jn 2:22*). Jesus had spoken these words that they might be a sign for his disciples. When he and the disciples visited the Temple, he expelled the money-changers and vendors from the holy place (cf. *Jn 2:15*). When those present protested, saying: “What sign have you to show us for doing this?”, Jesus replied: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”. The Evangelist observes that he “was speaking of the temple of his body” (*Jn 2:18-21*).

The prophecy contained in Jesus’ words was fulfilled at Easter, when “on the third day he rose from the dead”. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sign that the Eternal Father is faithful to his promise and brings new life out of death: “the resurrection of the body and life everlasting”. The mystery is clearly reflected in this ancient Church of the *Anástasis*, which contains both the empty tomb – the sign of the Resurrection, and Golgotha – the place of the Crucifixion. The good news of the Resurrection can never be separated from the mystery of the Cross. Saint Paul tells us this in today’s Second Reading: “We preach Christ crucified” (*1 Cor 1:23*). Christ, who offered himself as an evening sacrifice on the altar of the Cross (cf. *Ps 141:2*), has now been revealed as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (*1 Cor 1:24*). And in his Resurrection, the sons and daughters of Adam have been made sharers in the divine life which was his from all eternity, with the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

4. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (*Ex 20:2*).

Today’s Lenten Liturgy sets before us the Covenant which God made with his people on Mount

Sinai, when he gave the Ten Commandments of the Law to Moses. Sinai represents the second stage of that great pilgrimage of faith which began when God said to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (*Gen 12:1*).

The Law and the Covenant are the seal of the promise made to Abraham. Through the Decalogue and the moral law inscribed on the human heart (cf. *Rom 2:15*), God radically challenges the freedom of every man and woman. To respond to God's voice resounding in the depths of our conscience and to choose good is the most sublime use of human freedom. It is, in a real sense, to make the choice between life and death (cf. *Dt 30:15*). By walking the path of the Covenant with the All-Holy God the people became bearers and witnesses of the promise, the promise of genuine liberation and fullness of life.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the definitive seal of all God's promises, the birth-place of a new, risen humanity, the pledge of a history marked by the Messianic gifts of peace and spiritual joy. At the dawn of a new millennium, Christians can and ought to look to the future with steadfast trust in the glorious power of the Risen One to make all things new (cf. *Rev 21:5*). He is the One who frees all creation from its bondage to futility (cf. *Rom 8:20*). By his Resurrection he opens the way to the great Sabbath rest, the Eighth Day, when mankind's pilgrimage will come to its end and God will be all in all (*1 Cor 15:28*).

Here at the Holy Sepulchre and Golgotha, as we renew our profession of faith in the Risen Lord, can we doubt that in the power of the Spirit of Life we will be given the strength to overcome our divisions and to work together to build a future of reconciliation, unity and peace? Here, as in no other place on earth, we hear the Lord say once again to his disciples: "Do not fear; I have overcome the world!" (cf. *Jn 16:33*).

5. "Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando; dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus."

Radiant with the glory of the Spirit, the Risen Lord is the Head of the Church, his Mystical Body. He sustains her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the men and women of every generation, until he returns in glory!

From this place, where the Resurrection was first made known to the women and then to the Apostles, I urge all the Church's members to renew their obedience to the Lord's command to take the Gospel to all the ends of the earth. At the dawn of a new Millennium, there is a great need to proclaim from the rooftops the Good News that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (*Jn 3:16*). "Lord, you have the words of eternal life" (*Jn 6:68*). Today, as the unworthy Successor of Peter, I wish to repeat these words as we celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice in this, the most hallowed place on earth. With all of redeemed humanity, I make my own the words which Peter the Fisherman spoke to the Christ, the Son of the living God: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life".

Christós anésti.

Jesus Christ is risen! He is truly risen! Amen.

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