



## HOMILY BY MGR NOËL SIMARD FOR THE EASTER VIGIL - 11 APRIL 2020

Be not afraid... He has risen from the dead!

This is what the angel said to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who had gone to the tomb at dawn to "see the tomb".

While they are at the tomb, there is "an earthquake, and an angel comes down from heaven and rolls away the stone; this angel of the Lord looks like lightning and his garment is white. And he gives the women great news and a great revelation: Jesus the Crucified has risen from the dead. All this staging in Matthew's gospel is apocalyptic. Indeed, in the apocalyptic texts of the Bible, God's messenger wants to reassure the people to whom he speaks and who are living through troubled and difficult times of persecution, famine, epidemic and war. Whether it is in the book of Daniel, the prophet Ezekiel or the apocalypse of John, the angel, God's messenger, reveals to a people in exile or returning from exile or to persecuted Christians that death is defeated and that life has triumphed and will triumph in spite of all the outward signs that rather announce the victory of evil or death. This is the exact opposite of the idea of the apocalypse and of what is presented to us in films such as *Apocalypse Now* where it is about death, destruction, the end of everything.

We know and believe that Jesus was crucified, that He died and rose again. We believe that through our baptism we were united with Jesus who died and rose again, to die to sin and to live again with new life. Indeed, through His resurrection, Christ has dispossessed death of its empire and He has opened the way to God's life for us. And as St. Paul writes to the Romans: "If, then, by the baptism that unites us to his death, we have been laid in the tomb with him, it is so that we might lead a new life.

In spite of this faith that dwells in us, we remain fearful and even terrified in the face of the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic which brings with it sickness,

anguish, economic insecurity, fear and death. It is as if the virus has brought us into a tomb, a tomb of darkness, absence, anguish, fear, worry. We doubt and wonder if we will get out of it; we wonder what help is needed to roll away the stone of mistrust and fear. Yes, where will help come from to regain confidence in the future and the dynamism to continue the march?

On this Easter night, the Risen One joins us at the edge of the tomb of our fears and doubts. As he said through the angel and repeated it himself to the women of the Gospel, tonight Jesus reassures us: "Do not be afraid, I am alive, I am with you. Do not seek me among the dead, but among the living". The whole liturgy of this Easter Vigil reveals to us a God with us, a God who gives life, who liberates, who saves.

Tonight the Lord tells us again: "Do not be afraid, for I have been with you since the creation of the world, a world that is good but that is entrusted to you to make it a common home where sharing, solidarity and respect reign". Fear not, says the Lord, I have risen to bring you freedom as I freed my people from slavery in Egypt and protected them from the hand of Pharaoh. I know, Lord, that you have put a cloud between the people of Israel and the Egyptians; but tonight I would be tempted to ask you to put a cloud, an obstacle between the coronavirus and humanity to free it from this scourge. I am confident that this will happen through the researchers and scientists who are working hard to find an effective treatment and a vaccine.

Have no fear, I am with you to free you from your anxieties, from all that weighs on your shoulders, from servitude, isolation and death. Remember with what powerful hands I freed my people and acted against Egypt.

Do not be afraid. I have made a covenant with you and I keep my promise to bring you back from exile and make you live in your land again while you wondered how you would get out of it. Through the prophets, I have asked you to come back to me, to leave your tombs and let me put a new heart, a new spirit in you. Let us trust that what God accomplished in the past, He is doing for us today. Since our baptism, his Spirit of love has been with us and accompanies us on the sometimes tortuous and difficult road of life.

Have no fear: I am the God of life and not of death. And in this night I bring you the light that drives out the darkness of fear, hatred and withdrawal. Trust,

death and sin cannot have the last word. By my resurrection, I have conquered death, and I have joined you in my victory.

In tonight's gospel, the angel sends the women on a mission: "Hurry, go and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead and is going before you into Galilee. Jesus gives them the same instruction after appearing to them: "Go and tell my brothers that they must go to Galilee, and there they will see me".

This is also our mission. Disciples of Christ, we are sent to proclaim the Good News of Christ's resurrection, the promise of our resurrection. In these difficult times that we are going through, we are called as never before to be witnesses of hope and joy, despite the clouds that are presently hiding the sun. Let us ask the Risen Lord, who is our light and the light of the world, to illuminate our gaze and our walk in his footsteps, especially when the step becomes heavy. Let us ask the Lord to help us make the crossing, the passage from death to life with confidence, knowing that He himself made this passage in love and out of love. And may our proclamation of the victory of Life be made not only in words but also through these gestures of mutual help, consolation, compassion, sharing and solidarity, especially towards those who are currently going through the torments of illness and death.

Let us not be afraid to proclaim together: Alleluia, Alleluia, Jesus is alive, He is risen, He is our eternal springtime!

AMEN!