

Thank you all for braving the weather and being here today to make your offering of worship. The greater the sacrifice, the more the offering is worth, and it was a sacrifice to go out today, so I commend you for making that sacrifice to come and worship.

Did you notice that all of our readings for today speak about repentance and the forgiveness of our sins? Peter tells the crowds that he knows they did not know that they were crucifying the Lord, so he tells them to repent, and have their sins wiped away. John tells us not to sin, but if we do, we have an advocate with our heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, who is expiation for the sins of the world. And Christ tells his disciples that repentance will be preached throughout the world for the forgiveness of sins.

But why are we still talking about repentance? We focused on repentance for our sins all throughout Lent in order to prepare ourselves for the joy of Easter, and yet we are still talking about being sorry for our sins. But there is a marked difference in the tone of these readings compared to those that we heard during Lent. There isn't as much opposition to the saving message of Jesus, there isn't such obstinacy in sin, it doesn't seem like the battle between good and evil is so fierce, and there's a good reason for that: the battle is over; Christ has won. Whereas before Christ had to condemn the hardness of the hearts of those who opposed him because it led to his crucifixion, now there is an earnest appeal on the part of his apostles for the

people to repent and be forgiven, to be comforted and rejoice that our folly did not prevent Christ's victory. Peter invites the people to repent and be converted. John urges his audience to be consoled that Christ has forgiven their sins. And Christ tells his disciples: "Do not be troubled. I am alive. The Father's will has been fulfilled. I have conquered death. You are redeemed."

So these readings do speak about Easter joy even though they talk about repentance, because there is a joy that comes from being forgiven for our sins completely, the joy of knowing that a debt we had no way to pay was wiped away for us. That is the joy that comes through in the words of Peter and John as they speak to the people, not to condemn them, but to invite them to be forgiven. That is the joy that Christ tries to express to his disciples when he tells them to be at peace.

That transition, going from profound sorrow for our sins and the suffering they meant for our Lord, to the unspeakable joy of our forgiveness and the victory that Christ won through his suffering, is not always easy to make. Going from Lent to Easter can be difficult for some people. We get stuck in our sorrow. Even after we confess our sins, express our sorrow and hear the words of absolution, the memory of our betrayal and of our weakness can stay with us and can keep us from experiencing the peace and joy that Christ wants us to have in being forgiven.

The enemy knows this, and so he takes advantage of it any way that he can. This can take the form of thinking that our sin was too great, that simply confessing our sins and doing our penance was too easy, that God must demand more from us to make up for *that* sin. Or perhaps we walk out of the confessional convinced that we're hopeless, that we'll be back eventually confessing the same sins again, seeing no hope in ever overcoming them, and that keeps us from rejoicing.

These are lies of the enemy. Yes, God has made obtaining the forgiveness of our sins easy by giving us the sacrament of reconciliation: why would He make it difficult? He *wants* us to be forgiven. And while praying two "Our Fathers" and two "Hail Mary's" does not make up for our sins, neither would a thousand. It's not as though any amount of penance would truly, objectively make up for our sins, that's the reason why Christ had to come and save us. So we offer Him an act of penance to express our sorrow and thank Him for our forgiveness.

And yes, it may seem like we confess the same thing every time and there is no way to break the cycle, but my friends, there is, because God is stronger. God has broken the chains we could not break, He has freed us from the slavery we sold ourselves into, and there is no sin that can hold us so tightly that God cannot break its grip. That is what it means to have conquered sin and death. They are powerless when God is our strength. So do not despair; be at peace and rely on the sacrament, and believe that God can free you from sin forever.

Easter joy is the goal, it is what Christ desperately desires for us, it is what he earned for us by dying on the cross. “Why are you troubled? Peace be with you.” That is the message Christ gave to his apostles on appearing to them. May we be at peace, and praise our God with greater joy than ever for His victory over death and the forgiveness of our sins.