

Welcome, everyone, as we celebrate the holiest day of the year. I especially want to welcome those who are here visiting home this weekend or who are here for the first time. As I say here often: we are a group of sinners trying to figure out how best to serve God, what His will is in our lives. Nobody here is here because they have everything figured out or never makes mistakes. Nobody here – not me, not the choir, not the people sitting next to you – finds this easy. This church is a place where we struggle together, support each other, pray for each other, challenge each other to keep moving forward and grow in love of God and neighbor. We have all come here by our own unique path. Whatever your path has been, it really doesn't matter. We are thankful that it has led you here today – please know that these doors will always be open to you.

And what you will hear when you walk through these doors is that we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. If someone asked you why you believe that, what would you say? Why do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord? That's probably something we should have an answer to, especially if we consider it part of our mission to bring others to Jesus.

You might say, "Because he is," which is true, but that's not an explanation. You might say, "Because I'm Catholic," but that also wouldn't really explain it. *Why* are you Catholic, just because your parents *raised* you Catholic? If so, now you're

an adult, so why are you *still* Catholic? Because it's comfortable, you're part of a good community, it's part of your culture, part of your identity? Those are just accidental things, one could just as easily be an atheist and say the same thing. Surely they are not reason enough to say something so fantastic like you believe that two thousand years ago, there was a human being named Jesus who was the Lord God Incarnate. So if someone asked you why you believe that Jesus is Lord, what would you say? Why *do* you believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord?

We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord because he rose from the dead. That is the very core of our faith, and what we celebrate on this Easter day and on every Sunday. Christ died and then rose again, and left his tomb, empty. No mere human being can do that. For us, dead is dead. That is why we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. He must be Lord because he is risen.

But how do we know that he rose from the dead? We weren't there, so how do we know? Well, *we* may not have been there, but others were, and they have testified. In our gospel, we are told that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome saw the empty tomb, and an angel telling them that Jesus had been raised. Later, Jesus himself appeared to Mary Magdalene, and then to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He appeared again, to the apostles in the upper room, and then did so again, this time with doubting Thomas present, who put his fingers in the nail marks and his hand in his side. He appeared again, to the seven who were

fishing, and asked Peter three times if he truly loved him. And the apostles saw him ascend to heaven, until an angel came and said, “Why are you still here? Christ has ascended, and he will return in the same way.”

That is the foundation of our faith, that Christ rose from the dead, and we know he rose from the dead because he appeared to his disciples. After Pentecost, when Peter spoke to the crowds in our first reading, his simple message was, “Listen, my Jewish friends, and all who are in Jerusalem. These men can speak to you in your own language because the day of the Lord has come. And it *is* the day of the Lord, for Jesus the Nazorean, whom you crucified, has been raised up by God. *Of this, we are all witnesses.* So repent and be baptized.” And God backed up their testimony by giving them the power to work miracles, so that while they delivered this message, they also were able to give sight to the blind, to cast out demons, even to raise the dead, so that thousands were convinced and were baptized. And now, two thousand years later, here we are, in a country they didn’t even know existed, repeating their testimony again to these events as handed down through the millennia by the Catholic Church.

But what if he’s not risen? It doesn’t take much of an imagination to come up with a narrative where Jesus was just a prophet who died. What if it turns out that the disciples staged the whole thing, that they hid the body of Jesus and made up the stories of his appearances? Would your faith be shaken if there was

incontrovertible proof that the Resurrection was false, and you were now convinced that it never happened? If you found Jesus' tomb, with his dead body still inside it, would you stop believing that he is Lord? I should hope so! I would hope that you would stop believing if you had proof that Christ was still dead. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." Our faith is not independent of facts, it is not impervious to the truth. If ever we discover a truth that contradicts our faith, then our faith must not be true.

But have no fear, because there is no truth that contradicts our faith. There is no loose thread that you can pull on to unravel it. We have no proof of this, of course, because then it would not be faith, it would just be knowledge. We don't have *faith* that one plus one equals two, we *know* it does because it can be proven. Faith is believing in what cannot be proven. But it's been two thousand years, and it has yet to be shown that what the Catholic Church professes to be true is in fact false, and it's not for lack of trying.

This is not because Catholics are so smart; we're not. We're fallen human beings just like everyone else. No, it is because Christ has promised to protect us. He said to Simon, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." In referring to the gates of the netherworld, he is referring to the enemy, and who is the enemy? The father of

lies. The father of lies, of falsehood, of untruth, shall not prevail against his Church, built on the rock of Peter, whose office is handed down through the papacy. Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so within His Church can be found the Way, the Truth, and Life.

Let me be quick to add that I am speaking about matters of what we believe, not about what we do. The Catholic Church is full of sinners, from the top down. We get things wrong in what we say and do every single day, and constantly need to repent and seek forgiveness. Christ does not protect us from committing sin; he protects us from error in matters of faith and morals. We may break the commandments, but we know what the commandments are. We will never say what is good is evil, or what is evil is good, because God has promised that the Holy Spirit will protect us from such error.

So the Catholic Church fears no truth, no discovery, no new information. In fact, we hunger for it. That is why we developed the natural sciences, to discover the truth that God has written into laws of nature. That is why we developed archeology and history, because we are confident that what we believe about our past is true. If we ever find a tomb on which it is inscribed, "Here lies Jesus of Nazareth," we would be the first to open it to show that Jesus is not inside, not hide it for fear that he might be, because we are confident in the truth of our faith, and if it's false, we want to know it.

Jesus came to proclaim the truth, and his message was meant for everyone. It does not belong to a select few who get to be in on the secret – it is for the entire world. If you are interested in pursuing the truth no matter where it leads, then you will find your home in the Catholic Church. Journey with us as we grow in our understanding of what Jesus Christ has shown us to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life.