

It's a horrific sight. Did you see it? The pictures of wooden boxes, lined up for burial on Hart Island, in Long Island Sound, off the coast of the Bronx, buried there because there is no one to claim them. Some, perhaps, the victims of the pandemic. In any case, it certainly reminds us of the accounts of mass burials during the various outbreaks of history. Most people at one point in their lives encounter some tragedy. A car wreck on the interstate, a tragic accident, a terrorist or enemy attack, the scene of some vicious crime. Horrific sights that even years later, cannot be erased from the mind's eye. We are living in a time in which we see the horror of a roaring economy now gasping, thriving stores now shuttered, roads once busy now empty even at the 5 o'clock rush, churches that ought to be packed are sparse. We will not forget this Easter. It is, in its own way, horrific.

It was a horrific sight. The beloved Teacher, the kind, wise, heavenly Friend, on whom so many hopes were set, had been hung up for execution, put to death, and was buried. Who did this? Renegades? Some wicked ethnic group? An oppressive government? No. We did it. As the church sings in the Chief Hymn for Holy Saturday:

*O child of woe:
Who struck the blow
That killed our gracious Master?
"It was I," thy conscience cries,
"I have wrought disaster!"*

The horror was committed by our hands. And it far exceeded the death toll of any pandemic. It outnumbered the casualties from any battlefield ambush. It eclipsed the heartrending tragedy of any accident. It is not simply a life cut far too short, or an unjust execution. It is the suffering of every ill and injustice, the consequence of eternal damnation for each and every sin of every person who has ever lived. It was all borne by this one Man and it was our doing. Life itself died and dwelt in a tomb.

And it seems to have not even ended at death. The women go to the tomb and they see that the large stone is rolled away. What manner of sick abuse had been done now?! Do the Romans and Jesus' enemies in the Sanhedrin have no mercy, no respect for Him even in death?! The fears of the women are met by an angel. The angel preaches what the angels always preach: "**Do not be alarmed.**" The first words: Fear not! And just as the angel on Christmas night gave the shepherds the reason why they need not fear, so also today. "**Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified...is risen! He is not here!**" Jesus of Nazareth, the Man, the One whom they saw tortured and murdered with their own eyes, whom they have come to mourn and weep over yet some more, is not dead!

The worst horror on this earth, what we cannot even imagine, has been done to Jesus and He lives! What He suffered because of your sins, the punishment of eternal condemnation that you merited, did not keep Him dead. He has suffered every horror of sin, disease, grief, and shame, was shut up into the tomb in death, and none of it could hold Him.

It is all just as He said. Did you hear that in the angel's sermon to the women? He says "**tell His disciples...that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.**" Jesus had said what would happen: the horror of His betrayal and death, and His resurrection. Just two chapters earlier after leaving the Upper Room and on the way to Gethsemane, Jesus told the disciples what was coming: "**You will all fall away because of Me. For it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you into Galilee**" (Mk 14:27–28). What Jesus had said is shown to be true. What Jesus has done on the cross is shown to avail for you. The body that bore all of your sin and received the punishment it deserved is alive, risen, and free from all sin. The wrath and horror of sin, death, and hell have given way to the joy and glory of the resurrection.

How can you know this is true? You cannot look inside the mind of God to see what He thinks of you. You cannot phone heaven and ask God whether He is happy with you or angry. So how can you know that your sins are

forgiven? How can you know that death cannot keep you? Jesus rose from the dead. It shows that all that Jesus had said is true. It shows that the Father has accepted Jesus' sacrifice as perfect and sufficient. It shows that your guilt is taken away, your sin is atoned for. It shows that hell is robbed of its prey. It shows what is promised to you who have been set free from sin, brought out of Satan's dominion through your passing through the waters in Baptism and being joined to Christ.

We are not here to celebrate a life that met a horrific end on this earth, and now lives in heaven. We are not here to keep alive what is only a memory. We are not here to escape the reality of life in this world and its horrors. We are here to celebrate the fact that the crucified One lives and that His life is ours even now. It is given to us in this world that is filled with death. It is given to us as we daily crucify and drown our old selves: the old and evil leaven of our sinful nature. It is given to us in midst of so many fears and anxieties as His crucified, risen, and living Body and Blood is given to us. He is not in the tomb, He is risen! And so He is here, just as He said, for you to believe His words, for you to cling to Him, your Savior. He will never leave you, but will lead you through all to His glory.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!