

"No Doubt"

It is truly a blessing and an honor to see all of you today, as we celebrate the Resurrection. Lent was long and it was hard for a lot of people – but we are here today to celebrate – and that is a good thing! We are very blessed.

I want to share with you words from the Apostle Peter that we heard today read by Jay, so beautifully, from Acts chapter 10. *"They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* Those are the words of the Apostle Peter of all of the things that Jesus did and an eyewitness to the empty tomb. He spoke these words to the Centurion Cornelius in Caesarea, as we heard this morning from Acts chapter 10. As a result of those words, Cornelius and his entire family came to Christ and were baptized. Wow!

Peter had already fully received the Holy Spirit, along with the other Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. He didn't just speak as an ambassador for Jesus – but as an eyewitness of the empty tomb, and of all the miracles and healings that Jesus gave to the people he ministered to. The truth is "the tomb is empty!" Unlike the tombs of all of the other great leaders who ever lived – the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth is empty – because He lives! Today we celebrate Him, and the fact that He lived and died and lives again - so that we may do the same through faith in Him.

The women who went to the tomb on that Sunday morning certainly weren't expecting what they found. They weren't saying to the themselves 'well, we've got the spices with us just in case He's still dead, but let's hope that He's alive again.' They knew and had witnessed throughout their lives that dead people stayed dead! The eleven faithful, but scared, remaining Apostles, led by Peter, certainly weren't expecting the news they heard from these ladies. They were in hiding in the Upper Room, as Scriptures tells us that they were doing that "in fear of the Jews." The very fact that the women went to the tomb first and were the first witnesses to the glorious resurrection of Jesus, is a sign that this had to have taken place. Let me explain that, no one in the first century would have had women telling such a story, because women were not considered credible witnesses. Oh, how the times have changed, thank God! If this were a made-up account the Apostles would have been the first to go and tell the account of the empty tomb – but they were too terrified to leave the room.

In today's Holy Gospel we are told: *"When they (the women) came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James (which was Mary – the Blessed Virgin), and the others with them*

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who told this to the apostles. (James is believed to be the brother of Jesus – and Jesus does appear to him later) But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” (Luke 24:9-12) The account of the Resurrection is recorded in all four Gospels and all refer to the empty tomb – but surprise and confusion filled them with wonder and a little bit of doubt. They had been told time and times again by Jesus that *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”* (Luke 9:22) Jesus told them in Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31. And Matthew 16:21 – as well as other times – so this certainly was not new news to them (or fake news) but the emotions were running wild – and confusion reigned. Think about it – how would you have felt if your leader died, was brutally tortured – and you were told that he was suddenly alive again. As a matter of fact there was another eyewitness to the empty tomb was the Apostle John and in his Gospel he writes *“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”* (John 20:9)

We know as recorded that very same chapter 20 of John’s Gospel, that later that same evening Jesus appeared to them, all except Thomas in the locked upper room. *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”(shalom) After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”* (John 20:19-20) Jesus was not done in letting people know that He was indeed alive. In Luke’s Gospel – right after today’s reading in Luke 24:13-24 an amazing encounter took place: *“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still; their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”* Jesus opened their minds to all that took place was the fulfillment of Scripture through Him. They still did not recognize Jesus, and it was not until they sat down to eat *“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the*

road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together" (Luke 24:30-33) They left immediately to return to the upper room to join the others. After that Jesus appeared in that upper room.

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of the Apostles and the other disciples – knowing that Jesus was beaten and tortured to near death and then carried His cross all the way uphill to this place called Golgotha, the skull, where He was crucified, and then buried nearby in a borrowed tomb. Emotions must have been raw – and to suddenly hear of His rising from the dead. Can you just imagine your own feelings? I know I would be totally confused and in awe. But then to witness Him standing in front of you – alive and the only evidence of Friday were the nail scars in His hands and feet, and the pierced side from the soldiers' lance. He was and is alive today – His grave is empty. Just like the many miracles in which Jesus healed many, His appearances to His believers were for the same purpose.

- Jesus did not heal people to prove who He was,
- Jesus didn't raise people from the dead to prove who He was,
- He didn't calm the storm or feed the multitude to prove who He was.

He did those things to heal the hearts of those who received the miracle or witnessed them. Jesus appeared to those believers to heal their hearts and increase their faith. The Apostle Paul wrote this in 1 Corinthians 15:3-. Listen to this, *"for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."* Why would He appear to James? James was His brother, he like his other brothers ridiculed Jesus and said you can't be who you say you are. They didn't believe – it was like they had blinders on. Jesus appeared to him, and James became the head of the church in Jerusalem – the first bishop of the Jerusalem church. It is important to know that non-believers can and should believe in Jesus.

My friends there can be no doubt that Jesus Christ walked out of His tomb – and as I said before His tomb is empty – unlike all of the other religious and political leaders – who are still in theirs. They are still dead. Jesus of Nazareth is alive and He wants you to have no doubt.

- No doubt that He lives,
- No doubt that He died for your sins to be forgiven,
- No doubt that that you and I as believers can have eternal life with Him
- No doubt He wants us to share with others His Gospel
- And no doubt that He loves you like no one else and He will come again to take you home.

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The Apostle John ended his twentieth chapter of his Gospel by writing this: “*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” (John 20:30-31)

There is no other way to heaven than through Jesus, “*the way, the truth and the life.*” (John 14:6) My friends – He lives! And of that I truly believe that there can be no doubt.