

HOPE IS BORN THIS DAY

In June of last year, we had a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and there were 37 of us. And we were able to get to Jerusalem and then about half of our number came down with the Covid and were isolated in the hotel where we were staying. And then the rest of us were able to continue to try to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem, the ancient city (what they call the old city of Jerusalem) kind of coincides with the city that Jesus knew.

Jerusalem has been destroyed at different times in the course of the centuries and rebuilt, but they have a sense of where certain things are and where Calvary was and where Jesus was buried were actually very close to each other, not very far away at all. And where the Temple was and where the chief priest lived and where Pontius Pilate lived in the Roman garrison, the fortress of Antonia and where all the Romans were headquartered was very close to what is referred to today as the Temple Mount where the Temple of Jerusalem was.

And these are not long distances, relatively short distances. So much so that where Calvary is and where the tomb of Jesus is, is now inside one church. So when you walk in to the right, if you go up the steps, you're at Calvary. Calvary was at a higher location than where the tomb was. And if you go early enough in the morning, you can go in, go up the steps, and it's just quiet. Now, there are altars built over the site of Calvary and beneath the main altar, there's an opening in the marble floor and you can go up and kneel and place your hand in that opening and touch Calvary.

That's where Jesus died. And they celebrate Mass there. So where He dies and His blood was poured out, they celebrate the Eucharist where the bread becomes His body and the wine becomes His blood. My brothers and my sisters, Easter is about transformation. Transformation. Something which is this now becomes that, but it's not a faulty transformation. It's not an untruthful transformation. It's an elevating and an enhancing transformation. Bread becomes the body of Christ. Wine becomes the blood of Christ. He who was slain upon the cross. Now lives... now lives. In this Eucharist, when I hold up the host at the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. You'll see me break the host and you'll see me break off a little piece and I put it into the chalice. You've seen me do that a hundred times.

There's a meaning behind that. And it used to be that it was a sign that what was happening here was also the same thing that was happening at the place where the bishop was celebrating Eucharist. And so a piece of the bishop's host would be sent to the priest here and he would include that in his celebration. But it became so difficult to do that in so many places that you were told, you just break a piece of the host and it will represent your unity with the bishop. But as the church reflected on that liturgical action over the centuries they remembered that on the cross, all of Christ's blood empties out. And when the blood and the body are separated, that's death. But when the body, the small piece of the host is placed in the chalice, the blood is reunited with the body, are put together, and that means life. And it's a symbol and it means He lives. \*

The Eucharist, though, isn't a symbol. The Eucharist is real. The Eucharist means Jesus is risen. Jesus lives. It's not that He died a long time ago, and we remember that - we do remember of course. But that's not what this is. What this is, is, he died and He came forth from the grave never to die again. And He was seen by people and he spoke to people afterwards and He didn't go to the ones you would think, you know, "I'm going to appear to the chief priest and say, 'Hi there, remember me?'" There's none of that. There's no snarkiness in Jesus. He doesn't go where he is hated and not believed in. He goes to those who believed and struggled, the ones who denied and ran... those who had nothing but their tears to give him. He goes to them and He shows them his hands and He shows them his side. And he says things like "Peace be with you."

You know the little story that Michael just read of John's gospel where it says Peter and the beloved disciple ran to the tomb, but the beloved disciple outran Peter, you know, and he gets there, but he doesn't go in. He waits. And you say, "well, John was a little younger than Peter and he could run a little faster than Peter. And that's what we do. Do you notice that he has respect? Because Peter is the

elder. So Peter represents the institutional Church. The beloved disciple represents those in the Church who love Jesus. Love always gets to the tomb first. The institutional Church will get there, but usually not first. Love gets there first. Faith gets there first. And those who have love and faith have to believe that the big Church will get there. Our Church is human and divine. And right now people say, "You know, it's just in such a decline, it's going to end." Do you know how many times that's been prophesied \* falsely\* in 2000 years? Do you know how many times the Church has been put into the tomb saying "She (the Church) is dead. Put the stone there, seal it up, it's over." And yet she lives because her Captain is not crushed by the tomb and lives there no more. The Church on its human side is full of people like us, imperfect sinners, sometimes selfish, but she's divine too - perfect, full of life. At Christmas we say that love is born. This day on Easter, we say, hope is born this day. And love and hope lead us to faith. They're the only things, three things that last. Paul says in the end, only three things last, faith and hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Why is that? \*Because love is the strongest reality in the world. Love conquers this day. Death sin, evil, violence are all defeated this day.\* All of the big sins that crush people, all of that was defeated this day when Jesus comes forth from the tomb. He was broken. He was marred for our sins. They crushed Him. They thought it was over, bury him, move on. And yet, He lives. And you know where He lives? He lives in you and He lives in me. He's present here in Eucharist, but we receive the Eucharist and He lives in you and moves and has His being. Whether you feel Him or not becomes immaterial. It's about believing. Let the love of Christmas and the hope of Easter lead you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified but raised.

May our Lord bless us all today and give us His peace.