**2020 Easter Greeting Message**

“At the Lamb’s high feast we sing, praise to our victorious King.”

These words from the classic Easter Hymn are one of the Church’s treasures. They remind us of the joy of Easter we ring out every year. Our forty days of penance are fulfilled. Today on Easter, we bask in the glory of Christ’s Resurrection. After the fast, we feast.

Christ conquered sin. He conquered death. He won for us reconciliation with God. Through his great sacrifice, re-presented again at every Mass, he offers himself so that we may be joyful in heaven with God, eternally. Eternity is a very long time. Nay, rather, eternity is beyond time, outside of time. This year, though, Easter comes to us tinged with sadness, for we cannot physically come together as fellow believers, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to rejoice together on this most holy day of the year.

How should we as Christians respond to troubles such as this, which the whole country now faces?

We can begin to glean an answer to this question from the homily Pope Francis gave at the extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on March 27th. This blessing was “extraordinary” in the sense that it is normally given “to the city of Rome [*Urbi*] and to the world [*Orbi*]” only on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. But he gave a special, extraordinary (outside of the two ordinary times) *Urbi et Orbi* blessing during the season of Lent for the sake of pleading for God’s mercy to spare us from this current pandemic.

In this homily the Holy Father spoke about the disciples’ lack of trust when the storm blew up at sea and our Lord was sleeping in the boat. He said: “Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.”

Remember what happens in this story. Peter and the other disciples in the boat become fearful. They wake Jesus up, clamoring, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!” Jesus turns to them and says, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Why did Jesus rebuke the disciples?  As Pope Francis puts it, “They think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: ‘Do you not care about me?’ It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts.”

They thought the Lord did not care about them in their time of danger. They were afraid for themselves, which means their hearts were centered in on themselves. This is always the basic orientation of sin: to focus our thoughts, energies, and actions on ourselves. In other words, selfishness. Now, the opposite of selfishness is love: care and concern for others. It is also the cure for the anxieties that trouble us now and in the future.

We can dig further for an answer to the question of the sadness and distress we are feeling at this time by turning to the opening lines of the last verse of this classic Easter hymn: “Easter triumph, Easter joy:  Sin alone can this destroy. Souls from sin and death set free, glory in their liberty.”

A Christian who trusts in God is not sad at this time, because Christ has destroyed sin. Where there is sin, there is no joy; by destroying sin, Christ has destroyed sadness. The true Christian, who lives free from sin, knows the abiding joy that only Christ can give, even in the midst of hardship and the travails of life. Likewise, only the serious Christian is truly free, because true freedom is freedom from sin. Hence, the true Christian does not feel imprisoned by staying at home, not as long as there is no sin in the home. Rather, the true Christian sees this current situation as a new opportunity to show charity, to be other-centered, to show that he or she cares about the other with the love of Christ: “Yes, I am interested in you. Yes, I care about you.”

My brothers and sisters, let us look for opportunities to serve others in this time of need. All of this wisdom can be summed up in a paraphrase of the great Father of the Church, St. Gregory of Nyssa: If you try to outdo each other in charity, your life on earth will be like that of the angels in heaven.

Happy Easter!