



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT OF EASTER *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS*

St Peter's Basilica

Holy Saturday, 3 April 2021

[Multimedia]

The women thought they would find a body to anoint; instead they found an empty tomb. They went to mourn the dead; instead they heard a proclamation of life. For this reason, the Gospel tells us, the women “were seized with trembling and amazement” (*Mk 16:8*); they were filled with trembling, fear and amazement. Amazement. A fear mingled with joy that took their hearts by surprise when they saw the great stone before the tomb rolled away and inside a young man in a white robe. Wonder at hearing the words: “Do not be afraid! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen” (v. 6). And a message: “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him” (v. 7). May we too accept this message, *the message of Easter*. Let us go to Galilee, where the Risen Lord has gone ahead of us. Yet what does it mean “to go to Galilee”?

To go to Galilee means, first, *to begin anew*. For the disciples it meant going back to the place where the Lord first sought them out and called them to follow him. The place of their first encounter and the place of their first love. From that moment on, leaving their nets behind, they followed Jesus, listening to his preaching and witnessing the miracles he performed. Yet, though they were always with him, they did not fully understand him. Frequently they misunderstood his words and in the face of the cross they abandoned him and fled. Even so, the Risen Lord once more appears as the one who goes ahead of them to Galilee. He precedes them. He stands before them and constantly calls them to follow him. He says to them: “Let us start over from where we began. Let us begin anew. I want you to be with me again, in spite of everything”. In this Galilee, we learn to be amazed by the Lord’s infinite love, which opens new trails along the path of our defeats. This is how the Lord is: he creates new paths on the road of our defeats. This is how he is; and he invites us to Galilee to do this.

This is the first Easter message that I would offer you: *it is always possible to begin anew*, because there is always a new life that God can awaken in us in spite of all our failures. From the

rumble of our hearts – and each one of us knows the rubble of our hearts – God can create a work of art; from the ruined remnants of our humanity, God can prepare a new history. He never ceases to go ahead of us: in the cross of suffering, desolation and death, and in the glory of a life that rises again, a history that changes, a hope that is reborn. In these dark months of the pandemic, let us listen to the Risen Lord as he invites us to begin anew and never lose hope.

Going to Galilee also means *setting out on new paths*. It means walking away from the tomb. The women were looking for Jesus in the tomb; they went to recall what they had experienced with him, which was now gone forever. They went to indulge in their grief. There is a kind of faith that can become the memory of something once beautiful, now simply to be recalled. Many people – including us – experience such a “faith of memories”, as if Jesus were someone from the past, an old friend from their youth who is now far distant, an event that took place long ago, when they attended catechism as a child. A faith made up of habits, things from the past, lovely childhood memories, but no longer a faith that moves me, or challenges me. Going to Galilee, on the other hand, means realizing that faith, if it is to be alive, must get back on the road. It must daily renew the first steps of the journey, the amazement of the first encounter. And it must continue to trust, not thinking it already knows everything, but embracing the humility of those who let themselves be surprised by God’s ways. We are usually afraid of God’s surprises; we are always worried that God will surprise us. And today the Lord invites us to let ourselves be surprised. Let us go to Galilee, then, to discover that God cannot be filed away among our childhood memories, but is alive and filled with surprises. Risen from the dead, Jesus never ceases to amaze us.

This, then, is the second message of Easter: faith is not an album of past memories; Jesus is not outdated. He *is alive here and now*. He walks beside you each day, in every situation you are experiencing, in every trial you have to endure, in your deepest hopes and dreams. He opens new doors when you least expect it, he urges you not to indulge in nostalgia for the past or cynicism about the present. Even if you feel that all is lost, please, let yourself be open to amazement at the newness Jesus brings: he will surely surprise you.

Going to Galilee also means *going to the peripheries*. Galilee was an outpost: the people living in that diverse and disparate region were those farthest from the ritual purity of Jerusalem. Yet that is where Jesus began his mission. There he brought his message to those struggling to live from day to day, the excluded, the vulnerable and the poor. There he brought the face and presence of God, who tirelessly seeks out those who are discouraged or lost, who goes to the very peripheries of existence, since in his eyes no one is least, no one is excluded. The Risen Lord is asking his disciples to go there even now: he asks us to go to Galilee, to the real “Galilee” of daily life, the streets we travel every day, the corners of our cities. There the Lord goes ahead of us and makes himself present in the lives of those around us, those who share in our day, our home, our work, our difficulties and hopes. In Galilee we learn that we can find the Risen One in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the enthusiasm of those who dream and the resignation of those who are discouraged, in the smiles of those who rejoice and the tears of those who suffer, and above all in

the poor and those on the fringes. We will be amazed how the greatness of God is revealed in littleness, how his beauty shines forth in the poor and simple.

And this is the third message of Easter: Jesus, the Risen Lord, loves us without limits and is there at every moment of our lives. Having made himself present in the heart of our world, he invites us to overcome barriers, banish prejudices and draw near to those around us every day in order to rediscover the *grace of everyday life*. Let us recognize him here in our Galilees, in everyday life. With him, life will change. For beyond all defeats, evil and violence, beyond all suffering and death, the Risen One lives and guides history.

Dear sister, dear brother: if on this night you are experiencing an hour of darkness, a day that has not yet dawned, a light dimmed or a dream shattered, go, open your heart with amazement to the message of Easter: "Do not be afraid, he has risen! He awaits you in Galilee". Your expectations will not remain unfulfilled, your tears will be dried, your fears will be replaced by hope. For the Lord always goes ahead of you, he always walks before you. And, with him, life always begins anew.