



## EASTER 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How profoundly we have all experienced the desert of Lent, fasting from our everyday routines, praying for the recovery of our world, and giving in new ways to our loved ones and communities during this time of pandemic. How closely you have journeyed alongside Jesus on his way to Calvary, sacrificing your desires, preferences, schedules, energy, or even health, to respond to the call to love one another in service and charity. And, how keenly you have felt the agony of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, in which Mary and the Disciples mourned the loss of Jesus' physical presence and experienced intense longing for His return.

On the morning of the Resurrection, some women went to Jesus' tomb to mourn a dead man. As I think about the state of our world right now, and the dramatic effects it has had on all of our lives, it appears that we, too, journey with the women to the tomb to mourn. With our churches standing empty this Easter, it appears that we have been defeated. But, my friends, hear the words spoken to the women by the angel who greeted them at the tomb, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."

The sign of the empty tomb is not a sign of destruction and failure. No; rather, it is the sign par excellence of our faith. St. Paul tells us that without the Resurrection, our faith is in vain – it would be meaningless. (1 Cor 15:14) The empty tomb is the physical reminder of the Resurrection and the evidence that our faith is not in vain. The empty tomb confirms that Jesus is God, that he has indeed risen from the dead, and that sin and death are conquered.

While our churches are certainly not tombs, I ask you to consider how they are tremendous signs of faith in a world filled with fear. Our empty churches should remind us of the power of our faith, which is the power of the mercy and love of God. We may be physically distant from one another – and, how I long to see you at Mass – but we are not alone. Our God has come to save us. Jesus has truly risen and alive! He lives within us, for we are members of His Body, and he has not abandoned us.

After seeing the empty tomb, the angel instructed the women to go tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. I invite you this Easter to consider how you will share that message of faith, hope and love with those in your lives who may need this message of hope. How will someone know that you have seen the empty tomb and that this joy may also be theirs? How will your interactions with others or decisions that you make reflect a heart that is full of gratitude and dedicated to service? How will your actions of self-sacrifice and self-denial be a witness to our community of your respect for life? How will you forgive others because you have experienced forgiveness and new life in the sacraments? How will your longings for heaven attract others to seek the kingdom of God before all else?

Let this Easter be a time of renewal for your faith. See the sign of the empty tomb and rejoice in Christ's victory over our sin and death. Resolve to return to him with your whole heart, trusting that he will provide for your every need. Live in the joy of the Resurrection and share that joy with those who have yet to experience it. I pray continually for all of you, that through this time of physical separation, your faith may be strengthened beyond measure and that your hearts may be opened to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

With Easter joy, I remain,  
Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ Jerome E. Listcki*

Archbishop Jerome E. Listcki