

Easter Sunday
April 8 & 9, 2023

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All Saints, Syracuse

Roll Away the Stone

Tombs are everywhere... just look around us. I don't mean those marble burial chambers at Oakwood or St. Agnes or St. Mary's Cemeteries that we glimpse every time we drive by.

On this Easter, I'm referring to tombs of injustice that imprison people

- I think of people whose only crime might be seeking asylum from persecution at our southern border;
- I think of countless people who are assaulted and confined in tombs of gender inequality, sexual orientation discrimination, poverty... the 13204 ZIP Code in our own City is one of the *six poorest ZIP Codes in the United States!* Think Mississippi... think Alabama... *think the near west side of Syracuse!*
- I think of the countless sisters and brothers entombed in racial and ethnic prejudice: men women and children harassed and demeaned on a daily basis;
- I think of LGBTQ+ folks, and women and the divorced — who don't feel welcome in our churches... who are entombed and demonized by outdated and senseless Church doctrines;
- I think of the 740 or more homeless this Easter morning in our city who are entombed, wrapped in blankets, under a bridge, ... some 400 of who are youth — 40% of them, gay — couch surfing after being thrown out of their homes, ... often very religious homes;
- I think of the powerless and alone, the entombed who begin to believe lies about their worth, doubts about their abuse and huddled deeper into their tombs of shame and fear;
- and the list goes on....

Now, sisters and brothers, if that is the end of the story than we should have stayed in bed! But *this morning* we joined together with sisters and brothers across the city and across our world — joining our fore-parents of the last 2000 years — to celebrate Christ's freedom from the tomb of death, destruction, suffering and public humiliation.

We join this morning with Mary Magdalene: the first to witness the empty tomb; a woman whose reputation has been tarnished over the centuries, labeled a prostitute without any

Scriptural or scientific evidence. Mary Magdalene: *in every Gospel account is the first disciple to witness resurrection!*

We join this morning with the second disciple to arrive at the empty tomb: “the other disciple whom Jesus loved.” No name is given but most Scripture scholars agree it was young John. Perhaps it was the intention of the Gospel writer not mention the name so as to suggest that *we are all beloved in the eyes of God no matter age, no matter gender identity, no matter sexual orientation, social class, color of our skin, marital status, mental state, abilities or whatever!*

We joined on this Easter morning with Peter, the third to arrive, who immediately goes inside and discovers the empty tomb! No sign of the dead body, ... only the burial cloths. Where was all the suffering from three days earlier? “Where, O death, is your sting?” The enclosed tomb, once symbolizing confinement and death, had now become a place of freedom from all forms of hatred and inhumane conditions!

And so, sisters and brothers, what does all this mean to us on this Easter Morning 2023? We are called this Easter Day not only to believe that Christ once – 2000 years ago – rose from the dead, thereby proving that he was God. Sisters and brothers, we are called to experience the Resurrection of Jesus in our hearts, our relationships, our families, our neighborhoods, our city, our parishes, our Nation and our world.

How do we experience the Resurrection of Jesus?

When we love one another and join together as brothers and sisters in mutual encounter to continue birthing of the Kingdom of God, ...working together to roll away the stones from the tombs that confine us.

Miracles happen..., stones roll away *when we together harness the energy of love. True encounter with the risen Christ liberates something within and among us:* a power, a hope, a capacity for life, an ability to bounce back when we think we are completely defeated, a capacity to grow and change, a power of creative transformation!

By the way, did you see that Syracuse made FOX News this week?! Did you see it?! “Syracuse solves the gun violence problem... hand out \$100 bills to the gang-bangers on the streets!” they mocked, ridiculing the Mayor’s initiative – which we have been reflecting on these past two weeks. An initiative developed in consultation with cities around our Nation – designed to take the most hurting and needy kids on our streets and provide them with counseling, training and job opportunities and pay them a stipend; *an initiative that has been shown to reduce gun violence by 60%! FOX NEWS’* mocking is an example of what I’d call darkness... and if everybody embraced such darkness the initiative would go nowhere.

But – fear not! We have a petition to be sent to every City Council Member, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor supporting the Initiative – available for you to sign in our Greeting Area!!

Sisters and brothers, harnessing the divine energy of love, , ... joining with other people of goodwill, we are called to break open the tombs, roll away the stones and illuminate the darkness of our institutional structures and powers – secular and religious – that prevent people from being the persons that God created us to be; roll away the stones of all experiencing any form of mistreatment, most especially the vulnerable and marginalized, the women – whose stories we have yet to believe, the young, the elderly.

Harnessing that divine energy of love, we are called to end racism: systemic racism, unconscious racism, ... all the “isms” that entomb the children of God! Roll away the stones, open the tombs, let the light — the dawn of liberation come forth!

In conclusion, I share a few words from our Pope Francis who is celebrating his 10th Anniversary as Pope — a Pope who has birthed Resurrection and new life; who, like Pope John XXIII, has opened the windows of the church to let the Risen Spirit of Jesus breeze through our dusty Church. Reflecting on Resurrection, the Pope wrote in The Joy of the Gospel (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, ¶276):

“Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past, it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breakthrough, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always reemerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection!”

Amen