

As a student of philosophy in college, we occasionally encountered those who questioned its relevance. How does philosophy have any relation to the real world? Why bother to ponder such things? We would vigorously defend our chosen major with real life riddles such as “After a raindrop falling in Lake Itasca arrives at the Gulf of Mexico in three months, can one say it is still the same river?” “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” We’d try to pique their curiosity.¹

This morning, I’ll add another riddle. “If the Cathedral of Saint Paul is completely empty on this morning, is Easter any less meaningful than if it were packed with worshippers?” Being so different from all others we recall, many question whether this Easter is as meaningful? Certainly, we have missed your presence, we have missed the sounds of our Choir, the precision of our altar servers, and yes, as pastor there is one thing I have especially missed. No, I am NOT referring to the Easter collection, though the thought has certainly crossed my mind. I have especially missed the cries of babies, reminders of new life in the Church.

We have missed all these things because we are fighting what has very aptly been called an “invisible enemy.” It is a powerful Virus that has the potential for tremendous loss of life if not properly contained. While a powerful and unforgiving virus is a threat, especially to our most valued Seniors, today’s celebration of Easter is a more powerful reminder that death never has the last word. Not today, not ever.

Today, we ought to be on guard against another “*invisible enemy*,” that of indifference to the life of faith in Jesus. It has spread so much over the past two generations, that many are asymptomatic in its wake. They are unaware of its dangers and it stealthily invades their hearts and minds.

¹ The idea behind this question is often attributed to the thought of Irish Philosopher George Berkeley.

Many people of good will have become numb to the power of Jesus Christ in their lives, in some cases through absolutely no fault of their own. Others have imperceptibly strayed, becoming weakened by the cares of life, the pressures of school or their jobs and the many demands of family life. In truth, a few have willfully strayed from the faith. Nevertheless, it is up to us today, to spread the Good News.

Many who may be indifferent have at the very least considered their own mortality in a more immediate way, perhaps beginning to have second thoughts about their invincibility. Could that provide a silver lining?

“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him.” This simple and completely reasonable statement from Mary Magdalene serves as the backdrop for the miraculous events of the very first Easter Sunday. How could she have known the true depth of her statement? What were the women thinking to themselves that morning? Still in shock, they wanted to anoint his body, yet they did no real planning to facilitate this. Their motives remain somewhat shrouded. They simply wanted to be there.

Was it really all over? Could they not accept it and had to see again for themselves? Did their faith draw them there hoping against hope that he would be risen? I do not know the answer to these questions, but sometimes we can miss the most basic points.

These women indeed were hoping against hope that Jesus would not leave them orphaned—they believed in his word. I speak of Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast seven demons and often seen in tradition as the sinful woman who anointed the Savior’s feet in a city of Galilee. To whom did Jesus appear first? To whose ears did the news first reach? To the learned, the clever, the prepared, the logical, the teachers, the important people? No, he did not. He appeared first to those who were his most faithful disciples— those who would hope against hope.

Jesus Christ rose for the high school senior who resents missing out on all the treasured mileposts in this their signature year of High School. Jesus Christ rose for the restaurant server who has come to count on the income from tips to help pay for college. Jesus rose for the single mother, overwhelmed by the cares with which she must contend on a daily basis. Jesus rose for the elderly woman, widowed for many years who has outlived many friends and relatives.

Jesus rose for the business owner, whose decisions affect the livelihood of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people recently laid off. He rose for the prisoner who, having given into despair, contemplates yet another year removed from society. And he rose for those who are in a battle for their own life, struggling to breathe.

Sacred Scripture teaches that the women brought with them sweet spices. Today, those souls who because of their holy love come seeking the Lord—that's us—we can bring to the tomb the sweet scent of virtue, so said St. Gregory the Great in an Easter sermon.

There is no need to enter the tomb—it is as empty as this Cathedral. Yet, unless we explain the reason for its emptiness, it remains a symbol of defeat, as does the Cross. But Jesus Christ changed all that—if we are to be his disciples—we must proclaim that there is more than what we see.

The emptiness of our churches is neither our doing, nor certainly our desire. All the more reason that we must proclaim our faith to a world that increasingly sees faith as non-essential. Rather, it is foundational. The emptiness of the tomb reminds us that the whole world's space cannot hold Him, he who comes from heaven and who must return there.

We must not remain idle—we must go, tell his disciples, tell Peter, tell all that the emptiness of the tomb has brought about the fullness of life in us. He has been raised; he is not here. The invisible enemy of sin and death has been vanquished. Go forth to proclaim the Good News.