

Easter Sunday – The Resurrection of the Lord – Year C

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Holy Family Catholic Church

Kirkland, Washington

21 April 2019

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Psalm 118

Colossians 3:1-4 (or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8)

(see 1 Corinthians 5:7b-8a) John 20:1-9 (or Luke 24:1-12)

*The Work of Bees & the Light of the Resurrected Christ*

Two nights ago, on Good Friday, at the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion, I preached about the powerful photograph taken of the inside of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on Monday. It was the first glimpse of the inside of the burning Cathedral, and it showed the world that the Cross was still there; still glowing, still standing, and rising up out of the piles of ash, debris, and rubble. In the midst of a scene that was looking more and more like total loss and destruction, the Cross was a sign of Hope. A reminder that, with God, death, destruction, and loss are *never* the end of the story.

Since that image offered the first glimmer of Hope to the world, several other signs of Hope have come out of the devastating fire. There was the story of the priest who went into the burning Cathedral in order to save its two greatest treasures: the Blessed Sacrament and the Crown of Thorns. It was feared that the many pieces of sacred art would have been damaged by the fire, soot, and water – yet, after the fire, most were found to be undamaged. And, on a lighter, but still important note, the bees and hives of Notre Dame also survived the fire.

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The bees and hives of Notre Dame Cathedral are part of a network of hundreds of hives installed on rooftops around Paris in recent years, as a way to help increase the biodiversity of the city. Three hives housing 180,000 bees were installed on one of the flat roofs of the Cathedral. After the fire, the beekeeper and other bee enthusiasts around the world feared that

the bees and hives might not have survived. With access to the building restricted, the beekeeper wasn't able to check on their condition.

The next day, however, a satellite photo of the Cathedral showed that the hives were still intact. Good news, but did the bees themselves survive the heat of the fire? A couple days later, another photo emerged showing that, yes, the swarms of bees were still alive!

Once again, a small but powerful sign of Hope coming out of the destruction of the beloved Cathedral. A sign that, even when we fear all is lost, we see that *all is not lost*. That, what looks like death and destruction to us, God redeems and brings back to life. This is the Good News of Easter!

The women at the Tomb feared that all had been lost, that Jesus was gone from this world. On the first Easter Sunday, they came to the Tomb looking for the dead body of Jesus. This is why the angel asked them: “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?”<sup>1</sup>

With that question, their outlook was changed forever. All of our outlooks were changed forever. What looked like death, destruction, and loss to the world, the Father raised to new life. Beginning with His Son, Jesus Christ on that first Easter Sunday. We are called to allow God to continue bringing – not only that message of Resurrection – but that *reality* of Resurrection to our world.

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It is fitting that the bees of Notre Dame Cathedral were one of the many signs of hope during this Holy Week, because bees play a significant role in our Easter celebration each year. How so? The most prominent Easter symbol we have here in our sanctuary on this Easter Sunday – and throughout the fifty days of the Easter Season – is the Paschal Candle, “the work

of bees,” made from pure beeswax. The Paschal Candle is a symbol of the Resurrected Christ, who brings Light to our world and “an end to [the] gloom and darkness” of sin and death.<sup>2</sup>

The Paschal Candle is made of pure beeswax as a symbol of Christ’s purity, and is fittingly made by bees because they are an ancient Christian symbol of purity and holiness. What makes bees a symbol of purity and holiness? If there are any of our parish schoolchildren here, they will remember that back on December 7<sup>th</sup>, on the Memorial of Saint Ambrose, the patron saint of bees, I preached a homily about two things: why I like bees so much, and why bees are an example of holiness.

St. John Chrysostom said that “the bee is more honored than other animals, not because it labors, but because it labors for others.”<sup>3</sup> We Christians are called to be just like that. We are not to simply labor in this world – we are called to labor *for others*. This is why God gives us a vocation and gives us spiritual gifts. Our vocation draws love out of us, and it teaches us that the gifts God gives us are not meant for us to keep – they are meant for us to give *to others*. To put to service of the whole Body of Christ.<sup>4</sup> In our vocations, in our families, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, we are called by God to love one another, labor for one another, share our gifts with one another – and, in doing so, to bring the Light of Christ’s Resurrection into the world.

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So, how does the example of bees help us do this? In an address to beekeepers in 1948, Pope Pius XII explained that:

“bees are models of social life and activity, in which each [person] has [his] duty to perform and performs it exactly...without envy, without rivalry, ...with care and love. ...if [people] could and would listen to the lesson of the bees: if each one knew how to do his daily duty with order and love...if everyone knew how...to speak as a Christian, with charity in their dealings with their fellow men...how much better the world would be!

Instead, how often, alas, they spoil the better and more beautiful things by their harshness, violence, and malice: how often they seek and find in everything only imperfection and evil, and...turn goodness into bitterness!”<sup>5</sup>

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By quietly and diligently doing the work in this world given to them by God, bees produce so much *for others*. Instead of bitterness, they give the world the sweetness of honey and usefulness of wax. And, as we can see from the beautiful plants here in the church and blooming all around us outside, they pollinate the world, giving the food, air, and beauty that all creatures need to flourish with life.

We Christians are called to do the same. We are called to give sweet and useful things to the world. And we’re also called to “pollinate” the world. To go about bringing new life to the world through our good works, our kind words, our hopeful attitudes. These are the things that bring goodness, new life, and Resurrection to the world. And we’re especially called to do this for the poor and vulnerable; for those who are mourning or suffering; for the outcasts; and for anyone who doesn’t know about Christ’s message of Resurrection and new life.

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In his final Easter Vigil homily as Pope, Benedict XVI also made reference to the symbolism and importance of bees. He said that:

the *Easter Proclamation* “reminds us that [the Paschal Candle] has its origin in the work of bees. ... In the candle, creation becomes a bearer of [Christ’s] light. ... [Furthermore, the] cooperation of the...[members of] the Church...resembles the activity of bees. It builds up the community of [Christ’s] light. So the [Paschal] candle serves as a summons to us to become involved in...the Church, ...to let the light of Christ shine upon the world.”<sup>6</sup>

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Every time we see the Paschal Candle for the next 50 days, let’s not just admire its beauty. Let’s see *ourselves* in the candle. Just as “the work of bees” – the beeswax of this

candle – brings the Light of Christ to our sanctuary. So, too, our good works are the “wax” that brings the Light of Christ and His Resurrection to the world. When we bring sweet and useful things to the world; when we pollinate the world with beautiful and life-giving things; then the Light of the Resurrected Christ continues to burn – not just here in the church sanctuary – it continues to burn brightly for the whole world to see!

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I’ll conclude with a prayer from Pope Benedict, with which he concluded his homily from that Easter Vigil:

Let us pray to the Lord at this time that He may grant us to experience the joy of His Light; let us pray that we ourselves may become bearers of His Light, and that through the Church, Christ’s radiant face may enter our world. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:5

<sup>2</sup> See *The Easter Proclamation (Exsultet)* from the *Roman Missal*, Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter no. 19

<sup>3</sup> St. John Chrysostom (349-407), *Homily XII on the Statues* para. 5:

“...take from the bee at once a lesson of neatness, industry, and social concord! For it is not more for herself than for us, that the bee labors, and toils every day; which is indeed a thing especially proper for a Christian; not to seek his own things, but the things of others. As then she traverses all the meadows that she may prepare a banquet for another, so also, O man, do thou likewise; and if you have accumulated wealth, expend it upon others; if you have the faculty of teaching, do not bury the talent, but bring it out publicly for the sake of those who need it! Or if you have any other advantage, become useful to those who require the benefit of your labors! Do you see not that for this reason, especially, the bee is more honored than the other animals; not because she labors, but because she labors for others?”

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:7: “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit [of the whole Body].”

<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius XII, *On Bees: Address to Beekeepers*, 27 November 1948

<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Easter Vigil Homily*, Saint Peter’s Basilica, Holy Saturday, 7 April 2012

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Ibid.* Also see *Lumen Gentium* para. 1