

EASTER – RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Excerpt from Pope Benedict XV's homily - 20 April 2019

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20 April 2025

Brothers and sisters, as the women are bringing spices to the tomb, they fear that their journey is in vain, since a large stone bars the entrance. The journey of those women can also be our own journey. At times, it seems that everything comes up against a stone. It seems that the steps we take never take us to the goal. We can be tempted to think that hope is the bleak law of life. Today however we see that our journey is not in vain; it does not come up against a tombstone. A single phrase astounds the women and changes history: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (*Lk 24:5*).

Easter is the feast of tombstones taken away, rocks rolled aside. God takes away even the hardest stones against which our hopes and expectations crash. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the “living stone” (cf. *1 Pet 2:4*), the risen Jesus. We, as Church, are built on him, and, even when we grow disheartened and tempted to judge everything in the light of our failures, he comes to make all things new. Each of us is called to rediscover in the Risen Christ the one who rolls back from our heart the heaviest of stones.

So let us first ask: *What is the stone that I need to remove, what is the name of this stone?* Often what blocks hope is *the stone of discouragement*. Once we start thinking that everything is going badly we lose heart and come to believe that death is stronger than life. We become negative and hopeless. Stone upon stone, we build within ourselves a monument to our own dissatisfaction. Life becomes a succession of complaints, and we grow sick in spirit. It seems that everything ends there, with no hope of emerging. But at that moment, we hear once more the insistent question of Easter: *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* The Lord is not to be found in resignation. He is risen. Don't seek him where you will never find him: he is not the God of the dead but of the living (cf. *Mk 22:32*). Do not bury hope! We are *Pilgrims of Hope*.

There is another stone that often seals the heart shut: *the stone of sin*. Sin seduces; it promises things easy and quick, but then leaves behind only solitude and death. *Why do you seek the living among the dead?* Abandon that sin which, like a stone before the entrance to your heart, keeps God's light from entering in.

Let us return to the women who went to Jesus' tomb. They halted in amazement before the stone that was taken away. Seeing the angels, they stood there, “terrified, and bowed their faces to the ground” (*Lk 24:5*). They did not have the courage to look up. And how often do we do the same thing? We prefer to remain huddled within our shortcomings, in our fears. We think it is easier to remain alone in the darkness of our heart than to open ourselves to the Lord.

Yet only he can raise us up. The Lord calls us to get up, to rise at his word, to look up and to realize that we were made for heaven, for life and not for death.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? God asks us to view life as he views it. In Easter, he shows you how much he loves that life: even to the point of living it completely, experiencing anguish, abandonment, death, in order to emerge triumphant to tell you: “You are not alone; put your trust in me!”. Jesus is a specialist at turning our deaths into life. With him, we too can experience a Passover – from self-centredness to communion, from desolation to consolation, from fear to confidence. Let us not keep our faces bowed to the ground in fear, but raise our eyes to the risen Jesus. His love remains unchanged. This is the one, non-negotiable certitude we have in life: his love does not change.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? The women hear the words of the angels, who go on to say: “Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee” (Lk 24:6). Those women had lost hope, because they could not recall the words of Jesus, his call that took place in Galilee. Faith always needs to go back to Galilee, to *remember* Jesus, to *turn back to him with all our mind and all our heart*. Otherwise, our faith is a “museum”, not an Easter faith. Jesus is not a celebrity from the past; he is a person living today. We do not know him from history books; we encounter him in life.

Today, let us remember how Jesus first called us, how he overcame our darkness, our resistance, our sins, and how he touched our hearts with his word. The women, remembering Jesus, left the tomb. Easter teaches us that believers do not linger at graveyards, for they are called to go forth to meet the Living One.

Let us ask ourselves: *In my life, where am I going?* Sometimes we go only in the direction of our problems, of which there are plenty, and go to the Lord only for help. We keep seeking the Living One among the dead. Or we return to the dead, digging up regrets, hurts, without letting the Risen One change us?

Brothers and sisters: let us put the Living One at the centre of our lives. Let us ask for the grace not to be carried by the sea of our problems; the grace not to crash on the reefs of discouragement and fear. Let us seek him, in all things and above all things. And with him, we will rise again.