

Easter Sunday – Year B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – April 1, 2018
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Most of us – at least those of us of a certain age – believe that we have seen it all. There is very little that could surprise us – and certainly nothing that could truly shock us. In the lifetimes of many of us gathered here, we’ve seen humans walk on the moon – and three astronaut crews perish while reaching for the stars. Some of us have endured both Vietnam and Iraq, Communism and Fascism, terrorism and ethnic cleansing. We bear the scars of Pearl Harbor, and of Mỹ-Lai, and of September 11, of school violence and of legalized abortion, of assassinations and of racism and of political corruption, of war and of economic injustice. We often find ourselves jaded – always expecting the worst from the world because we have seen the worst so many times. Nothing, it seems, could ever truly amaze us.

In our gospel today, the young man in the white robe – the angel, we presume – cautions the women who approached Jesus’ tomb: “Do not be amazed!” No problem here, we might well answer, nothing amazes us any more. Oh, sure, the women find that the tomb is empty – but there’s probably an explanation for that. The skeptic within us tells us that we need not assume that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead – and even if he did, it is really that remarkable? Modern medicine is reviving people close to death every day – could this just be one more? When Jesus tells us that bread and wine have become his body and blood, that our sins are forgiven, that the kingdom of God is at hand, we have trouble taking his statements literally. Yet when this angel says, “Do not be amazed,” we readily comply. The events of our lives have driven amazement right out of us. So much so that if God were sending an angel today, I suggest, his words would be very different. To this generation, the angel might well announce: “Be amazed! Be very amazed! For Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one, has conquered the unconquerable – Jesus the Christ has conquered sin and death!”

In his last encyclical letter to us, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote about the mystery of the Eucharist in the Church. In the introduction, St. John Paul said that in writing the encyclical one of his goals was to reawaken our amazement in the Eucharist – in the enormity of Christ’s gift to us. Whether because we are swept up in the advancements of modern technology or because we are shell-shocked by the violence and injustice in our world, our society has become so blasé. We are a tough crowd to excite because we have seen it all. But if we are excited and amazed by nothing else, we should be excited and amazed by

the Paschal Mystery – by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – for it is only in the Paschal Mystery – it is only in Jesus Christ – that we can find hope, hope that the violence of our world can be conquered, hope that our sufferings have meaning, hope that death is not the end. We rejoice today not because of a fascinating historical event two millennia ago – but because of the profound promise and hope that event, that resurrection, that first Easter morning continues to bring to us.

Each time we gather around the table of the Lord, we renew our faith in the Paschal Mystery, we rekindle the hope that mystery gives to us, we are washed once again in the abundant love of God. That is the gift of the Eucharist – that is the gift of our salvation – that is the gift of Easter. The challenge is not so much to believe these truths – for most of us have made a profession of faith. We believe these truths but too often we are not convinced that they matter, that they make a difference in our lives. The challenge of our time, I suggest, is not only to believe, but to be amazed by these truths, to be energized by them, to take them to heart, and to appreciate them not just on Easter Sunday but every hour of every day of every week of every year of our lives. How do we do that? Well, each time we pause to pray – and hopefully that is at least once a day, each time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist – and, hopefully, that is at least once a week – each time we participate at Mass, may we consciously remember the joy of our first Eucharist. May we consciously place ourselves in the Upper Room celebrating the Last Supper with Jesus and the Apostles. May we consciously place ourselves at the foot of the cross when blood and water – the fountain of our faith – flowed from the side of Christ. And may we consciously place ourselves at the empty tomb where we can confidently rejoice that death has been conquered and that sin no longer has power over us. Pay no attention to that young man in the white robe. Today, I challenge you to be amazed! Be very amazed! Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead! Alleluia! Alleluia!