

My Dear Parishioners of Saint Gregory,

I hope you are all keeping well and safe. The weeks leading up to Easter have been a challenge for us all. Though we have been hunkered down in prayer, we have also been cut off from one another, and have missed celebrating the Easter Masses as a community of faith. We miss you and we miss the joy of community life.

I thank the staff members who make it possible to video the Masses, and also thank the staff members behind the scenes, for editing and bringing the Masses online for you – all by way of iPhone video. Our technology is very limited. We are grateful to our young staff (it was an inspiration to hire young people) who bring you morning, afternoon, and evening transmissions. We are also very grateful to Monsignor Gallagher, who brings this Sunday's Mass to our community.

Years ago, back in 1999, I was fortunate to attend Easter Sunday Mass at the empty tomb and see the Franciscans enter in. As I stood on the wall above to watch with Fr. Mike Leonard from Clare, we were both on Sabbatical, the Eastern Orthodox people paraded behind us with palms for Palm Sunday. Now that's a twist! The homilist, a Franciscan and custodian of the Holy Land, reflected that if by fantasy we could go back to that first Easter morning, we would see a new sepulcher in an abandoned quarry dug out of rock and a large round stone overturned. Instead of a marble floor there would be the green grass of spring, and perhaps some trees in blossom.

It was at this quarry that Mary Magdalene came on Easter morning to complete the burial rites for Jesus. When Mary arrived, she discovered that the tomb was empty aside from only the limp discarded sheet. She rushes back out into the open, short of breath, and bursts into tears. Her anguish is palpable as she is unable to honor the dead body of Him who freed her from seven demons and returned her to life. In the shadows of the garden she sees the silhouette of a man who approaches; "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" In the timbre of that voice there is an echo of that voice imprinted in her memory, yet she only sees the gardener. As he pronounces "Mary", she replies, "Rabbouni, Master". She would like to touch Him as she fears that He is an illusion; instead it is He, Risen and Alive! Jesus says, "Do not touch me, but go tell my brothers you have met me. Tell them my grave is empty. Tell them I have overcome death forever." Here in this place we understand the Risen Jesus is the gardener of life, the one who overcame death by passing through it and conquered all our fears and anguish; that by taking upon Himself the evil of the world, he has conquered all evil.

The Risen Jesus is now my sure hope. To welcome Him with faith is the only vaccine that can save us from the virus of death, fear, and anguish; from the virus of evil that effects all of humanity and the meaningless and aimlessness of life. Today, just as the pandemic is still sowing death over the world, I feel that it is up to me, to you, and to all of us, to accept the invitation that Jesus made to Mary Magdalene; "Go tell my brothers you have met me! Tell them my grave is empty. That the sting of evil has been broken, it can hurt but no longer kill.

Tell them that fear, anguish, despair, and death have been overcome forever, and that a new humanity was born here at the empty grave.

Happy Easter to the sick, and to their families, and to all the nurses and doctors who assist them. Happy Easter to those passing to the Lord from this world, and to priests at their committal services. Happy Easter to those putting their lives at risk for essential services. Happy Easter to each one of you this Easter season, and to my family and friends in Ireland. Happy Easter to my brother, Mossy, who is in recuperation from double hip surgery. May the Risen Lord guard you in hope and make you glimpse the life that flows from the empty tomb, from His appearances behind locked doors, and to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

Greetings and Blessings this Easter Season,

Fr. Nick