



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD. AMEN.
CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

My Beloved,

Priests, Deacons, Servants, Members of Church Committees, and all the Congregation, my sincerest congratulations to you all for this Glorious Feast of the Resurrection that we celebrate tonight.

As we celebrate this glorious feast, I am reminded of the words of the great 4th century church father, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who said, "To keep a feast authentically is to incorporate the saving events into our core identity and way of life."

How can we incorporate the saving events of the Lord's resurrection into our own lives? What impact does HIS resurrection have on MY life?

Let us reflect on the first person who witnessed the resurrection – St. Mary Magdalene – and see the impact it had on her.

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (John 20:11-13).

That was the scene just moments before the blessed St. Mary Magdalene became the first witness to the greatest miracle to ever take place. Try to imagine the scene – she is standing outside the tomb and sees the stone has been rolled away, an impossible task no human could have done alone. She is weeping. She is sobbing. Her emotions are going from bad to worse. She came to the tomb to mourn for her crucified Lord, and she now discovers that not only is He dead, but they've gotten rid of His Body too – something very disgraceful in the ancient Hebrew culture.

A bad day just became worse and you can imagine her feeling standing inside that tomb – that empty tomb. Crushed. Depressed. Defeated. Hopeless. The tomb was the worst place ever.

But then it all changed. It all changed when she saw the Risen Lord. He appeared to her and called her by name, "Mary." She recognized Him immediately and that was it. That changed everything.

Defeat turned to victory. Depression turned to joy. Hopelessness turned to hope... real hope... the kind that cannot be taken away, even by death itself! What a turning point. As Isaiah the prophet said, *"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces"* (Isaiah 25:8).

And where did this transformation all take place? **IN AN EMPTY TOMB!**

The tomb of Christ bears special significance in Christianity. All of the earliest Christian creeds stress on three important facts: that Christ died on the cross, that He was buried in a tomb, and that He rose from the dead on the third day. It makes sense why they'd stress on the Crucifixion and Resurrection –



but why the emphasis on being buried in the tomb? Why is the tomb so important?

Think back to the rites of Good Friday. One of the most powerful rituals is performed at the conclusion of the 12th hour, when we take an icon of Christ being laid in the tomb and we do with the icon what they did with the Christ's Body 2000 years ago. We anoint it with sweet fragrant spices and wrap it in a shroud. That is our way of reliving the actual burial of Christ.

And then, earlier in tonight's Liturgy, when all the lights are turned off, we return to the tomb to unwrap the icon and remove it from the shroud. And we proclaim with boldness that "Christ is risen from the dead" and the empty tomb stands as a continual reminder to us all!

So the next time you find yourself down and in need of hope, picture the empty tomb. Stand by Mary Magdalene inside it and see for yourself that it is empty. Hear the voice of the angel saying, *"He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him."* (Mark 16:6).

I think we all need to take heed to the angel's advice. When you are feeling down, see the place where they laid Him – look to the empty tomb.

When you are feeling defeated, see the place where they laid Him – look to the empty tomb.

When you are feeling hopeless, or weak, or in need of a miracle... see the place where they laid Him – look to the empty tomb.

Whatever your situation might be, go to the tomb of Jesus and as long as it is still empty, then there's hope. There is always hope! There's hope because if the tomb is empty, then our Savior is alive! And if He is alive, then we know that we shall walk with Him in newness of life, as our teacher St. Paul said, *"Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:4).

May God grant us all to find comfort, strength and hope in the empty tomb of Christ. And may He grant us all to walk in newness of life from this day forward.

Through the intercessions of the Mother of God, St. Mary, and through the prayers of the first witness to the resurrection, St. Mary Magdalene, and through the prayers of our holy father and shepherd His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

BISHOP PETER

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of North & South Carolina and Kentucky.
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia.