

## ***Think of What is Above***

Homily for Easter Sunday 2020

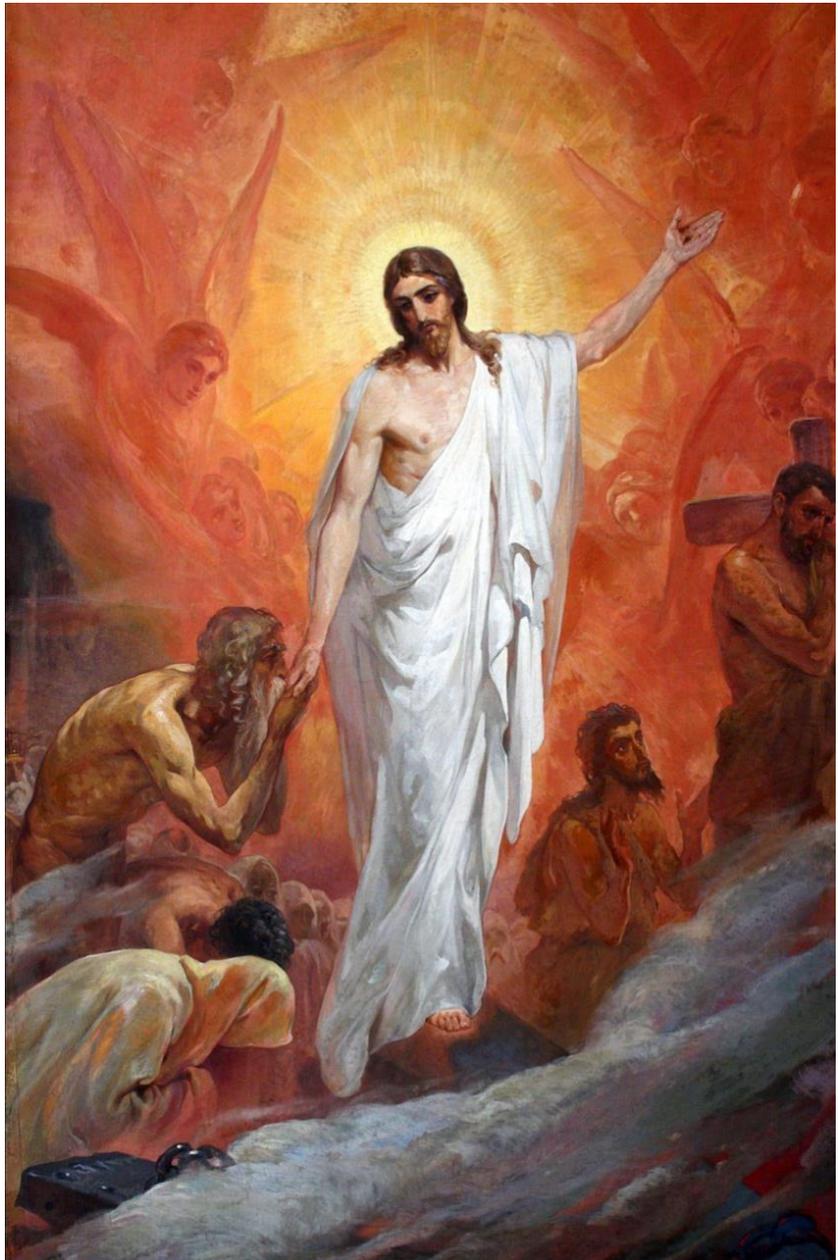
*Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; Luke 24:13-35*

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! We sing “Alleluia,” a Hebrew expression of timeless and endless joy! We do so to uplift in our hearts the great uplifting of Jesus – who as God – brings the resurrection of God to each and every one of us.

How is our sung “Alleluia” a truthful response to the darkness that surrounds us? How can we sing in the grips of the COVID-19 epidemic? It was a Jewish German philosopher from the Frankfurter School – Theodor Adorno – who ultimately arrived at the insight that if there is ever to be real justice in the world it must be for all time and all places – current and past – and it was our Emeritus Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI who connected this insight on justice to the Easter resurrection in his encyclical “Spe Salvi” (Saved in Hope).

Christ is risen! There is justice for the world! And that justice is not just limited to the here and now of a today building for a better tomorrow. It is a justice that retroactively heals the harm of the past because this justice is rooted in a God who IS love!



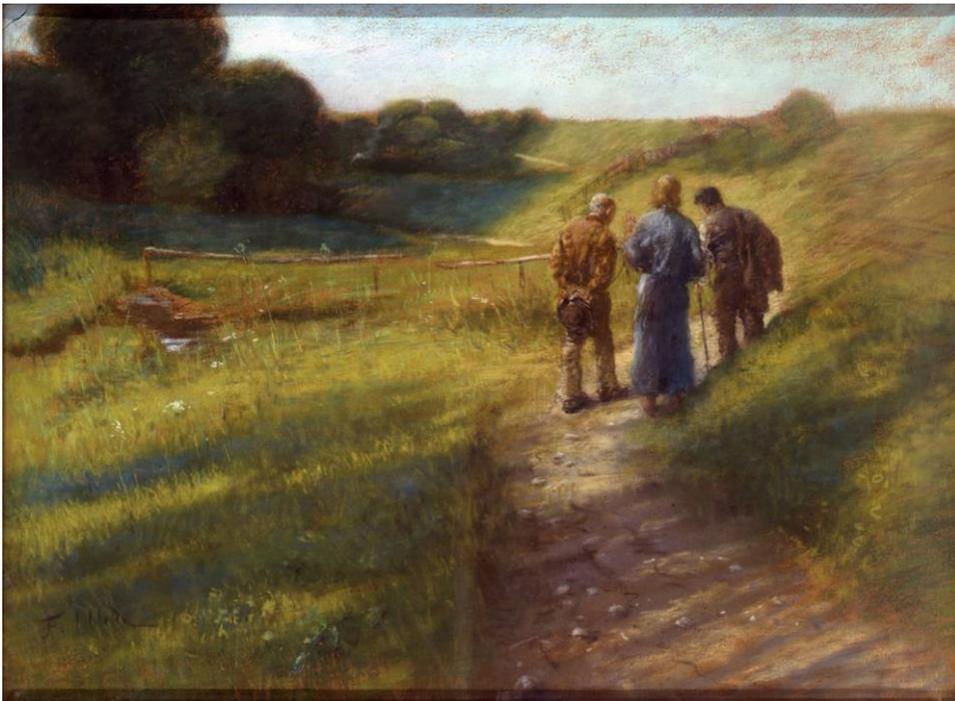
Because God is love he does not allow any source of pain or suffering to drift into the past unnoticed. He sees those dying of COVID-19. He notices the suffering and fatigue of the many first responders. He notes the grave injustice against the unborn. He sees what Pope Francis terms as the “hidden euthanasia” of the elderly through neglect. He grasps the grinding poverty of the poor, the plight of the undocumented who have no social safety net. But he does not overpower it or conquer the suffering and injustice with violence. No. As the all-compassionate God, Jesus gets inside the injustice – he rescues

it and redeems it. In Jesus, God's act of forgiveness from the tortuous death of the cross overpowers evil and injustice. With the descent of Jesus even into hell, God reaches back retroactively into the darkest corners of creation, giving sinners the hope for salvation if their hearts are open.

How can we touch this divine love that Jesus – as God – brings to us in his rising from the dead? I think the interpretive key is found in our second reading from the book of Colossians: "Seek what is above..." St. Paul commands his fledging community at Colossae. "...not of what is on earth."

Might these be our words of comfort during this time of confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic? Might we be invited to lift our sightlines from the gruesome reality of death during this international health crisis?

Are these words some kind of escape from reality of injustice and suffering in our world? No. Quite the opposite. The basic human lesson proclaimed by Jesus is that those who try to save themselves will lose themselves while those who lose themselves – even in the suffering and death of the cross – gain not only themselves but the world. Those who seek what is above and look to the heavens can best bring that sense of the eternal to the daily tasks of life. When we seek what is above, we bring heaven to earth including the dark and hard places of suffering, sickness and death. When we seek what is eternal, we become more human. We become more the person God created us to be. We become for others His image and His likeness.



So, turning to the Gospel from St. Luke, let us stay with Jesus. Let us allow him to accompany us as he did with the disciples on the road between Emmaus and Jerusalem. Let us allow him to teach us how to explain the meaning of the scriptures in the time of crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Christ is risen!" May the report of those disciples of Emmaus be our report too. "Christ is Risen!: This means we can "...seek what is above..." and thus enrich

what is here below – not only in our current moment of crisis – but for all time, and thus bringing into the light all that is dark in our world today because Jesus Christ is our Alpha and our Omega, our Beginning and our End, our source of hope, our very life, our resurrection. Alleluia! Peace be with you!

Art: "The Harrowing of Hell," Nikolay Koshelev, 1900. Public Domain;  
"Walking to Emmaus," Fritz Von Uhde, 1891. Public Domain.