



Christ of the Desert Catholic Church of Antioch
12455 N. Columbine Drive
Phoenix, AZ 85029-2173
(602) 230-5358

Most Rev. Mark Elliott Newman OC
Bishop—Diocese of Arizona

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“Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised.” (Luke 24: 5-6)

To all the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Arizona: Peace, Joy and our Apostolic Blessing.

On the morning following the Sabbath, the women who went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid were greeted with a puzzling and disturbing sight. The stone that had been used to seal the tomb had been rolled away. The tomb was empty and Jesus’ body was nowhere in sight. As the women pondered this mystery, there appeared to them suddenly two men in dazzling garments, who asked them why they were looking for Jesus among the dead. One can only imagine the confusion and fear these faithful followers of Our Lord must have felt. They had seen Jesus die and had been present at his burial. They knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was indeed dead. Now, they were confronted by an empty tomb and strange, luminous beings who appeared seemingly out of nowhere and told them that Jesus was not dead, but was very much alive.

We can also imagine their excitement as their fear and confusion began to give way to unimaginable joy as the reality of the Lord’s resurrection began to take hold in their minds and their hearts. Scripture tells us that the women immediately ran to those disciples who, because of their fear, were still in hiding and announced the good news to them. They were met with skepticism or outright disbelief, but despite this response from the other disciples, the women continued to announce the Lord’s resurrection, eventually prompting the others to go to the tomb and see for themselves. They, too, saw the empty tomb and began to wrestle with the question of the meaning of these troubling, yet exciting, events.

The feast of Easter, the Feast of Feasts, celebrates an empty tomb and a Risen Lord. The death and resurrection of Christ took place not just within the confines of time and space, but also beyond time and beyond space. When Our Lord died and was buried in the tomb, he was also buried in the depths of all humanity, all who had ever lived, all who were alive at the moment of his death and burial and all who would ever be born. Our Lord was buried in the very depths of our being, yours and mine, where he continually awaits anew his resurrection. The Resurrection of Christ

is not a one-time event, limited exclusively to Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago, but rather an ongoing process, by which Christ is brought to life in each and every one of us.

When we accepted baptism into the life of Christ, we committed ourselves to active participation in this ongoing process. We agreed that Christ would no longer be buried in the tomb of our ego-based wants and desires. We agreed instead that we would roll back the stone of our self-centeredness by which the Living Christ is kept buried within us and allow Christ to rise again, transforming our lives into His. If we take our baptism seriously, then our lives must become both an empty tomb and a reflection of the Resurrected Christ. But how often do we allow this to happen? Why do we continue to keep Christ buried inside us?

There is no one answer that neatly explains why we continue to keep Christ buried within us; the answers are as unique as each of our lives. Yet whatever the reason, whether it be the fear of rejection by others, our own doubt and skepticism about Christ's presence within us, or our addiction to our own presumed self-importance, it is our task, each and every one of us, to free ourselves of this limitation and allow Christ to rise again. When assailed by our doubts and limitations, we must become like the women who ran to the other disciples and despite the disciples' disbelief, continued to proclaim the good news until, eventually, they too believed. We must never allow doubt and uncertainty to override the reality of Christ's life within us and keep us from participating in his Resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, now more than ever the world needs the presence of the living Christ. Our world is hurting deeply and humanity seems to be more lost than ever. In the liturgy of the Eucharist, we proclaim that Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again. Christ comes to our world in many ways, but one of the most immediate is in the life of each one of us. None of us is likely called to be Christ for the world as was our brother, Jesus, but all of us are called to be Christ wherever we are. One by one, as Christ comes alive within us, we can begin to influence the world to live by the values he taught; justice, harmony, peace and unconditional love. What greater gift can we give the world? What greater presence can we have?

As we begin this joyful Easter season, I urge you to roll away the stone that keeps Christ buried within you and allow him to come forth in glory, into your life and into the life of our world.

With sincere wishes for a blessed Easter, I remain your brother in Christ,

Most Rev. Mark Elliott Newman, OC
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