By now, I’m sure many of you have seen images like these, from the devastating fire that occurred earlier this week at the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. I’m sure some of you have probably visited there before. It’s still on my “bucket list” items to visit. Despite the terrible destructions of property and the overwhelming sentimental loss that was felt by millions around the world, it was indeed truly a Holy Week miracle that no one was killed out of this incident. They were very fortunate that only a few firefighters sustained some minor injuries. Just imagine if this had occurred any other time during this week, while there was a mass taking place, the results would have been much, much more catastrophic.

In light of this tragic accidental fire, there seems to be some saving grace as it awakens and unites the hearts of the people of France, in a country that has recently suffered not only from series of terrorist attacks and so deeply divided politically, socially and economically among its people. The people of France have laid aside their differences and focus upon their own healing and support of one another emotional AND spiritually. Collectively many have lost a piece of their heart, their spiritual icon and memory, but their resolve and courage remain unwavering.

The timing of the fire could not have come at the worst of time AND the best of time…on Holy Week nevertheless. It is the worst of time because this historic house of worship will be closed indefinitely and will not be able to offer a space for the faithful to come, to pray and to meditate. However, it is the best of time, because it reminds us that our faith is more than any buildings and monuments, religious artifacts, statues, or relics. Even Jesus himself reminded the women who came to the empty tomb on the Resurrection morning looking for him, as Jesus said, *“****Do not hold on to me****, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"[[1]](#footnote-1)* **Our faith is more than what we can see with our eyes and what we can hold with our hands!** This event reminds us that resurrection and new life are possible, by the grace of God, even after a tragic loss or even death as we remembered this holy week.

In the two passages that we read earlier, they both centered around the Resurrection story. The resurrection story gets retold year after year, but it never gets old. In fact, resurrection moments occur every single day and not just once a year. Sometimes we just have to pay closer attention and to look for those moments, just as the women and the disciples did when they ran to the empty tomb to look for the resurrected Jesus, but found none.

In the Matthew passage, Jesus was addressing to his disciples, in particular Peter, who was also known as “The Rock” because of his personality, his faith and conviction. Jesus mentioned that ***“upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*** Jesus was foretelling of what was about to happen, but the disciples were clueless of what he meant by that.

Now, before we go any further, we must clarify that Jesus was NOT referring to Peter “the Rock” himself, on which he would build the church. But instead the church shall be built upon the disciples’ faith, conviction, and witness, as demonstrated through the resurrection of Christ. The apostles not only became the voices of the church, but they also became the hands and the feet of the gospel. They were the preachers, leaders, healers, and workers of miracles, as the foundation of the church was being laid upon one’s faith and not upon any particular individual or one’s personal achievements.

As you recall Peter was the one who denied knowing Jesus 3x after he had declared that he would even surrender his life because of his faith. Peter was just another disciple, like any one of us, who are also vulnerable to human weaknesses and sins.

The name “Peter” is from the masculine Greek word *petros*, which means a small stone, whereas the object “rock” is from the feminine word *petra,* which refers to a rocky mountain or a peak. Jesus was comparing “Peter”, a small stone, to the great mountainous rock on which Christ would build His church. Peter was just a member of the larger group. The church is greater than Peter himself. Peter happened to be one of the more outspoken leaders, a prolific preacher and an advocate of the gospel, but Peter was NOT the church.

As a devout practicing Jew, Peter went through his own transformation “conversion” experience that reversed his perspectives and perceptions towards the Gentiles, whom many considered as the outsiders, the strangers, the foreigners, and the uncleans. According to Acts, Peter spoke passionately before crowd of Gentiles. And on that day, over 3,000 believed, confessed, and were baptized[[3]](#footnote-3). But Peter could not have done this by his own power. The Holy Spirit was working alongside with him.

Peter did this not for his own glory but for the sake of gospel and for the glory of God. Peter attributed all of this to his unwavering conviction and his boldness anchored upon his faith in the resurrected Christ. Peter bore witness of the resurrected Christ and he shared what he witnessed with others, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the New Testament affirms that **while many apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church by being the laborer and proclaimers of the gospels, Christ alone is the chief cornerstone, and the only head of the church.** The rock becomes a symbol of God’s faithfulness and the established covenant that will last into eternity.

This is metaphorically significant on this Easter morning, as **our entire Christian faith and our Christian hope are rooted upon the empty tomb, and the rock that rolled away.** **The Rock of Resurrection opened our eyes and our hearts, so that we may see, believe, and tell others about it.**

The Rock of Resurrection symbolically removes any physical separations between the living and the dead, the believed and the unbelieved. It transforms people’s lives, as evident in Peter’s life, in others’ and in ours. This is what this day of Resurrection all about…that **as Easter People, we live each day by demonstrating our living faith and the testimony of hope, both inside and out.** We may from time to time, run into the empty tomb to look for evidence of Christ’s resurrection, in order to disprove our disbeliefs. ***As the angel said to the women who came to the tomb, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell others…[[4]](#footnote-4)***We must go out and proclaim what we saw upon the faith of the living rock, that has now been rolled away.

Friends, what this **Rock of Resurrection did for us is that it opens up a whole new way of seeing the world or how we may relate to one another.** No longer shall we be classified according to our socio-economic status, our racial and ethnic differences, or even our varying political views. Christ’s death and resurrection has conquered and triumphed above all of those. His resurrection has proven to us that it is possible that we can all get along with one another as ONE people in the unity of the Spirit. As Peter proclaimed that when it comes to the new kingdom of God, “*God does not show partiality*”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Christ died for us all, and Christ resurrected for us all. Through Christ, we shall see new possibilities and new beginnings of what things may be, according to God’s purpose, God’s will, and God’s timing. **It is upon this Rock of Resurrection that God will build the church!** We are all invited to be a part of this journey together.

**Out of the fiery ashes and burning rubbles, the church shall rise once again. God is about to do a new thing in the midst of chaos and even destruction. We must lay aside our own selves and let it die in the tomb. We must not search for Jesus in the tomb for he is no longer there. He is risen! He has paved the way for a new beginning for us. Out of the empty tomb, the linen cloths and shrouds, a new community of believers has arisen.**

**Friends, as Easter people, we are called to bear witness to God’s hope and to bring new life and purpose in this Good Friday world.** Chris is risen! Christ lives in us and among us now and forever. May it be so. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. *John 20:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 16:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Acts 2:41* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 28:5-7* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Acts 10:34* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)