

## Easter Message

If you visit the Holy Land you might discover that there is some confusion about some of the exact locations of some of the Holy sites. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is well attested in tradition as the site where the Lord was crucified and buried, but in the nineteenth century a Victorian English General Gordon suggested an alternative. General Gordon was a committed Christian and he loved the Bible and if you visit Jerusalem you can see what Gordon believed was the site of Jesus' burial. It's called the Garden Tomb – it is very beautiful and a great place to sit in silence and to pray and, although it is very different from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it has one feature that I like very much. On the opening to the tomb is a sign which reads: 'He is not here, he is risen!'

The text comes from Matthew 28: 6 where we read that the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen just as He said! Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.' See, I have told you."

There is so much that is important for us in the message of the angels to Christ and we begin with the message: 'Do not be afraid.' This is one of the most frequent assurances in scripture. The message 'Do not be afraid' appears throughout the scriptures. Before making a covenant with Moses, the Lord tells Moses, "Do not be afraid." Gabriel tells a terrified Daniel, "Do not be afraid." An Angel tells the father of John the Baptist, Zachariah, "Not to be afraid." Gabriel said to Mary troubled at being told she is to have a child, "Do not be afraid." An Angel assures Joseph in his dream, "Do not be afraid." The shepherds startled by the Christmas message are told, "Do not be afraid." Jesus tells a fearful Peter thinking he was a ghost walking on water, "Do not be afraid." Then to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb the message is: "Do not be afraid." It is because the tomb is empty that this message is real and is for each of us.

And the message to you today from the Lord is the same, whatever your situation, whatever your struggles, whatever your challenges: 'Be not afraid'. And why is this message from the Lord more reassuring to us today than to the Old Testament prophets? Because the Lord is risen.

In some countries on Easter Sunday people will greet one another with a special phrase. If you were in Greece, you might hear people say Χριστός ἀνέστη! (Khristós anésti!) and the response will be: Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη! (Alithós anésti!). In Russia people traditionally greeted one another with: Khristos voskrese! And the response to this would be: Voistinu voskrese! In English we would say: Christ is risen! And the response is: 'He is risen indeed', and we might also add: Hallelujah! Hallelujah is a Hebrew phrase and means make a joyous praise in song or boast to the Lord.

The Apostle John, when he was in prison on Patmos met Christ in a vision. The Lord told John: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold, now I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and of the grave." (Rev. 1: 17-18).

This is a message for all of us. Our 'prison' may not be literal, but it can just as restrictive and destructive. It might be because you feel imprisoned in circumstances over which you have no control. It might have to do with oppressive relationships or with past experiences which continue to affect your life. Or perhaps it has to do with poor choices that have been made. Perhaps it has to do with sin or sickness or just disappointments and frustrations. Whatever our 'prison', our 'grave', the message is the same: 'Do not be afraid' because Christ is risen – He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Fr. Sam Randall



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