

Easter Morning 2026

+ Happy Easter to all of you, welcome to any of you who are visiting. Each and every one of you are here for a reason, a God given reason...so it is good that you are here. Sometimes I begin a homily with a story or even a joke, it can be a helpful way to capture attention, to ease into the homily. Well I tried to think of a joke, one for Easter...I even googled it. But they were awful, you would only be laughing in pity. So I don't have a joke but if there was ever a time where it was fitting for Mass...today would be it.

Starting in the 15th century in Germany, priests would tell a joke or a funny story at the Easter Mass to get the people to laugh. Why, because laughter is the result of joy and today is the most joyous day of the year. But this custom was also based on the Resurrection of Jesus being a joke played on Satan. The devil thought he had won on Good Friday...he was wrong. Satan thought that by the death of Jesus, he had won. The joke is that *because* he died, he was able to rise from the dead...Jesus is alive. So this morning we laugh at Satan and he can't handle laughter...because he knows no joy.

And our joy is real because not only is Jesus really alive, we can now live forever. Death is nothing to fear...not for anyone who has died and risen with him through the sacraments of the Catholic Church. This life that Christ offers us entails beauty and order and it bears fruit. It's why the great story of salvation can be understood as a story of gardens...four gardens to be specific. What do you find in a garden, order, beauty, and life. A garden is set apart from the wild, there's boundaries and design. The tulips go there, the roses over here...you separate the different vegetables in rows. The beauty is obvious, so many different shapes and colors that make it a joy to look at. Finally, a garden has life...it bears fruit.

What was the first garden...Eden, given to Adam and Eve. It had all the elements of a garden but we know that because of sin, disorder set in. Sin introduced ugliness to the world. And most tragically, death occurred, the loss of true life. The second garden is where Jesus began the work of redemption, restoring what belongs in a garden. This was in the garden of Gethsemane, where he took on disorder and ugliness, and ultimately death itself. He labored in that garden, sweating blood...because a garden doesn't just appear, it requires attention and labor.

The result of our Lord's labor, his suffering and death, it resulted in our redemption by His Resurrection. And this too happened in a garden. St. John tells us that Jesus's tomb was in a garden just outside the city. It's why when Mary Magdalen was at the empty tomb and Jesus appears, John tells us that she mistook him for the gardener. She was wrong in one sense, but Jesus actually is the ultimate gardener...rising from the dead, Jesus gave us everlasting life.

But I said there are four gardens and the fourth is where Jesus wants to continue his work...your soul. He desires to enter your life and by his grace dwell in our souls. He wants to reestablish within us the order and beauty and life of God...just as He intended all the way back in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. Our souls are meant to be our own personal garden of Edens. As the divine gardener of our souls, Christ wants to heal the disorder and chaos that has set in. That healing comes from friendship with God.

To grow that friendship Christ roots out sin, the ugliness that can appear. By confessing our sins and being forgiven we can come to enjoy more fully the glory of being children of God. There's also life in a garden, just as God desires there to be life within us. And not just a little, Jesus said I came that you may have life and have more abundantly. He would go on to say, I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will remain. And of course for a life to bear fruit it

must be nourished, which is why our Lord gives us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Nothing comes remotely close to the nourishment offered by the Eucharist...its life itself.

This garden which is our soul requires work and attention, Christ offers that but only if we participate with him. He needs our desire, He doesn't force himself where He isn't wanted. But if we're willingly, he has given us the sacraments, prayer and worship, he has shown us how to live. That's how we tend to the garden of our soul. And just as with a literal garden, we know what happens if we abandon it even for just a few weeks...the weeds pop up, the plants wilt and die. Easter Sunday, this morning, is when we recommit to taking care of the garden of our soul, it's why Jesus rose from the dead...that we may rejoice at his very real presence in our life. That presence brings the order and beauty and life we all want.