APRIL 25, 1943

I greet you all, noble countrymen and countrywomen, with the words: Let Jesus Christ be praised.

The hated Galilean lost. He was defeated, beaten and crucified. The victory is complete and final. Above the standing cross on Calvary, the strong Angel of death stretched his majestic wings of sadness. Weakened by suffering and loss of blood, writhing in pain, after three hours of dying, the sacrifice gave up the last breath, the head bent earthward, death came silently. – “No man spoke thus”. Yes, but he no longer will speak. Death has sealed his lips once and for all. Never again will the forces of evil and darkness, the blind leaders of a blinded nation hear the words of the bitter truth. Gone is the tongue which reprimanded their behavior with words which burned their hardened consciences and stone souls. Despite his death, those lips still hold the harsh words which condemn. “O, whitened sepulchers! Cunning serpents! Slippery lizards! Hypocrites! Blind and leaders of the blind! Emptiness, you have made meaningless the commandments of God! Yes, that voice filled with just anger – quieted. True! But the second voice of change and hopefulness, the voice of love and mercy, of goodness and pity. “What can I do for you?” “Take up your pallet and go home. Your faith has cured you.” “Go in peace, your sins are forgiven”. These are words of healing, words of forgiveness; they belong already to the past. “And he went about doing good.” Now those torn-apart legs nailed to the wood, bloody, will walk no more. “No one in the past of Israel was like him!” “And never will there be one like him on earth.” Truly it was the end of one who claimed to be the Son of God. What happened to those who were so dear to him? Where are those who listened to his teaching and looked upon his miracles?” One tied a rope around his neck and hung from a branch of a tree. He committed suicide. Another ran away and hid. A third denied him three times. And the rest? Besides John and the holy women, the rest hid themselves. Was this the end of him and his followers? Night fell. A day passed and one more ordinary night.

HE IS RISEN!

When Christ had died, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised at news of the death of Jesus. If he had realized at least for a moment the pain he suffered on Golgotha, he might have understood that after three hours, Jesus had closed his eyes. But the sufferings of the accused did not interest Pilate for he had other things to do and so had not time to devote to that matter. He had fulfilled his duty. However he did send one of the soldiers to confirm the death of the crucified. He told the soldier that the body should go the Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the high Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. The Soldier confirmed the death by piercing the side of Jesus with a spear. Blood and water flowed from the wound. This proof motivated the body to be taken from the cross. Taken from the cross the body was placed in the lap of the Mother of God, whose tears washed the bloodied face of her Son. Then on to the grave dug in form of a cave and the possession of Joseph. Here Joseph prepared the body with oils and covered it with a clean sheet. These beaten and wounded remains where placed on a rock with a bit of rock under the heard. Then those attending went to their homes. Writers maintain that Mary Magdalene remained by the grave the longest. She only left when the soldier guards were approaching to keep vigil so that the body would not be taken away secretly at night by his followers. “Pilate said: You have guards go and protect the grave the way you wish. They rolled a stone at the entrance and guarded the grave.” The guard settled in. They were warned not to sleep and to make sure no one came near to the grave. These were Roman guards and wondered why they had to guard the body of the crucified. The thought that something big was going to happen and they feared. Every little disturbance scared them. It seemed that some spirit, some invisible thing was close by. Occasionally they would check their armed protection and then relax a bit. And so hour after hour passed by. The Sabbath has arrived, the day of rest. It seemed that death had triumphed over the Giver of life, and hell had won a victory. And then the next night arrives. The wind begins. A storm seems to be rising. The guards become wary and a fear grips them again. The wind stops. The dark gets deeper. The guards could hardly see one another. Suddenly a great light issues from the grave. The natural sun is not rising. What are they seeing? The great stone by sealing the grave begins to move. The grave is opening. The stone is rising. The image of the crucified begins to appear. The image of one who is victorious over death and hell. In one moment the great sadness has turned into joy and celebration. The hills and mountains bow to the resurrected Christ. He comes out leaving the grave empty. Left behind is the shroud which had bound his blood stained wounds. The soldier guards run away and tell the priests what they had witnessed. The priests told the guards to relate that his followers came and took him from the grave while they slept. The sun came up and spilled its rays over the empty grave. Soon the women came to the grave. The image of an angel appears in the grave. “Do not be afraid if you are seeking Jesus; he is not here. See here where he was laid. The left hurriedly to tell his disciples that he is raised. Go to Galilee, you will see him there. They left in great joy to tell the rest of the disciples. And coming back they realized that Jesus had proved his divinity by rising from the dead. The crucified had risen from the grave. Human weakness had turned into the might of the Divinity. Shamefulness had turned into Glory. Death was victorious the night and satanic anger crushed. This is news that fills every human with triumph without bounds. And today I call to you with the words of Paul the Apostle: “Rejoice and be glad for this is the day the Lord has made!”

We have two reasons to rejoice. First a friend is happy when his friend is glorified when he is victorious over troubles. The student is proud of having a great teacher be victorious. Isn’t that why we were in pain at the suffering of our Savior?! Did we not weep on the way of the cross that Christ had undergone? Everyone who acknowledges the teaching of Christ rejoices today at Easter time. The second reason for rejoicing comes from our very selves. Although we cried and suffered with the Savior on Calvary, similarly we had to cry for our sinfulness. There would not have been a Calvary it wasn’t for our sins. If we weren’t what we are, there would not be a Good Friday. Out of Love the Lord gave up his body to beatings and crucifixion. It is for us that he took on the cross. “He was wounded for our transgressions, for our anger.” And so there is a place for every human soul in the sufferings of Christ and so there is rejoicing with the Savior for the fact that we have been saved. The crucifixion is not only a proof of his divinity but the assurance for every human being that his resurrection is a sign of the grace of God. And for the person who has not sinned grievously and for the sinner who has repented, Christ insured a glorious resurrection similar to his.

The resurrection is convincing evidence of our own resurrection. There are, however, two conditions for the promised glory. Cleanliness of soul and spotless conscience. Take note of the manner in which Christ attained his glory. He took upon himself a human heart, a human soul and human conscience. But he took these things from source that was clean, spotless and beautiful. Through a 33 year lifetime he lived among people but not according to their ways. And when in the Garden of Olives he saw the immensity of human transgressions, he underwent such emotional stress that his blood curdled. Even though he was God-man he suffered as a human. He fasted. Humbled himself. Prayed. And in the end he gave his body to beatings, crowning with thorns, and crucifixion. And this in order to be an example to people. Each of us is obligated to fast, pray and discipline ourselves in order to prepare our soul for its resurrection.

The knowledge that Christ resurrected translated itself into faith in a personal resurrection and transformed a group of fearful Apostles into very serious and fearless proclamation of the teachings of the Master. From that moment on we throw ourselves into the depth of the battle with darkness, with evil, with falsehood and carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And what is the upshot? Difficulties, suffering, imprisonment and martyrdom. But no matter. Because besides death and the grave, we see something else. Our own glorious resurrection. The Apostles paid for it with their own blood. I choose the one who in a moment of weakness and doubt denied the Master. And under the influence of some inner voice journeyed to Rome. There, in spite of persecution, he stood in the catacombs and said, “I have seen the Lord.” Mobs came to him. In Rome in the arenas, flowed the blood of martyrs. Caesar and the pagan Rome bathed in that blood. The pagans raved on. The Apostle taught peacefully, believing that in each martyr’s tears are born new believers. And those in whom there was crime, these who were stepped upon, those whose life was a live of imprisonment, all who were downtrodden, all who were sad, all came to listen to the curious teaching about a God who, in his love for people, gave himself up to crucifixion in order to expiate for their faults. Later, he rose from the dead: Bringing forth a God whom they could love and learning of things that to this time the words knew not – contentment through Love. Peter understood that neither Caesar not all his legions can win over the living truth, not tears, not blood and that it is just now that the victory is accomplished. The aged Apostle was first destined to be prescribed by law - flogging and the next day was sent to the walled city, to the hills toward the Vatican, where he was destined to bear his punishment - the cross. Soldiers were surprised at the crowd that gathered before the prison, since the concept of the death of a simple man and in addition a foreigner should not have to be such a big event, but they did not understand that this procession did not consisted of those merely interested, but the followers who want to arrive at the place of execution of the Great Apostle. In the afternoon the gates of the prison were opened and Peter appeared in the middle of the Praetorian Guard. The sun lowered itself on the horizon and the day was quiet and peaceful. Peter, in view of his age, was not given a cross to carry because he would not be strong enough to bear it. He went forward freely and the faithful could see him clearly. In a moment when in the midst of soldiers with iron clad helmets he could be seen in his head of grey hair, the crowd erupted in tears while the Apostle proceeded with calmness and joy. This was not a sacrifice in the manner of a loss, but a triumphal procession. This fisherman humble and bent, went now with upraised posture, taller than the soldiers and full of seriousness. Never before was there sucho888 majesty in his posture. He seemed like royalty proceeding amidst soldiers and the crowd. Voices were raised from all around: “Peter is going to the Lord.” Everyone seemed to forget that Peter was headed for punishment and for death. The procession proceeded with focus but in a peaceful manner feeling that from the death on Golgotha until now there was nothing equally great and that while the other death saved the world, this was to save the city. People paused along the way and with awe at the sight of this old man observed with peaceful voice, “See how he dies justly – the man who knew Christ and spoke of Love on earth.” Pensively as they walked away: “Truly, this man could not be unjust”. Along the way, the din of the street subsided. The procession wend it’s way among newly constructed dwellings and the white columns of temples among which hung a deep, soothing, and blue sky. The procession proceeded silently only broken at times by the clang of the soldiers’ armor or the murmur of prayer. Peter listened and his countenance shone an ever greater joy on seeing the throng of his believers. He felt that he had accomplished his mission and that he had spoken about the truth his entire life…a truth that no one good inhibits. And in the midst of these thoughts he lifted his head and said: “Lord, you asked me to conquer this stronghold and I have done so. You asked me to make it your capital, and I have done so. This is your city now Lord and I am going to you because I am very tired.” Passing the pagan temples he spoke to them: “Now you shall be Christ’s temples.” Looking upon the crowds of people passing before his eyes he spoke to them: “Your children shall be at the service of Christ. And so He walked assured, in the knowledge of service, of might, at peace. The faithful from Transtevere joined in the walk. But no disturbed cry came from the crowd. Their faces were engrossed in the greatness of the moment, solemn and at the same time expressed with great anticipation remembering that at the death of the Lord the earth shook and the dead rose from their graves, thinking that perhaps at this time there would become visible sign at the death of the Apostle. Others said to themselves: “The Lord will choose this moment for the coming of the Lord as he had promised.” In that moment they dedicated themselves to the mercy of the Savior.

The procession stopped at the Vatican hill. The solders began to dig the grave, others brought a cross, hammer and nails, waiting for the proper time; meanwhile the mob silent and recollected knelt in the surroundings. The Apostle with his head encased in rays, turned for the last time toward the city. Surrounded by soldiers, he looked upon the city as would a king on his domain and said, “You are saved and you are mine.” And no one not only the solders or the grave diggers who were to put up the cross and even the faithful could guess that the ruler of this bit of land is standing before them and that the beyond the ages of the Caesars, this old man will leave a continuing heritage in ages to come without a break in the lineage.

Suddenly he stood erect and raised his right hand. The soldiers hesitated at his assured attitude. The faithful also gasped. Calm ensued. The Apostle said: “I am not worthy to die in the manner of the Lord. Cries of joy travelled down his cheeks. The onlookers were attentive as he continued, “Crucify me head down” – At this odd request the executioners agreed.

The first Christians followed the example of the attitude of the Apostle. They all faced life without fear of anyone or anything. With serious understanding the Christians were animated despite the persecution, the burning the sacrifices, the amphitheater, the wild animals because they believed in the resurrection and the continuance of the lives after death.   
After all, Christ was victorious after his death. And so throughout the ages Christianity made its mark and spread through the teaching of the Resurrection. At one time, the Apostle of the Nations watched the stoning of Steven the martyr. He said, “Unless Christ resurrected empty is our teaching and empty is our faith” “I know that the Savior is my life. These words were the motto of the believers from the moment Christ left his grave to the present time. That motto gave strength and hope to the believers and was their consolation during the time of persecution, torture and suffering. They saw these words written in the star, on the vaults of heaven. They saw these words sketched in the trees, the flowers and the grasses on the surface of the earth... They wore them written on their souls, hearts and consciences.

I read somewhere that among the families living in “Marok”, there are hidden keys to the homes in Spain, from which their forbearers were thrown out for 1200 years. Once a year the parents take these keys for hiding and show them to their children. They cheer their children with the hope that someday the time will come and they will return to their fatherland and their homes, from which their forefathers had been exiled. The Church does the same thing. One a year on the Feast of Easter the Church shows the faithful and the unbelievers the key to faith. And that is, “the might of the Resurrection of Christ: the key which opens the keys of death. And we look at eternity after the grave, an eternity which will be ours. We look forward to these heavenly homes will be ours because Christ promised them to us when he said, “There are many mansions in the Fathers house. If it were different, I would tell you for I go to the Father to prepare you a place, so that where I am, you might also be.

That certainty, or rather the certainty coming from the lips of Christ, ought to strengthen and motivate us to go on the path of life and serve with dedication and be buttressed against the vicissitudes of life; to keep the faith, be sincere and straightforward with depth and might; to live with Christ and to die with him. Such a death has no source, because whoever loses his life will find it. We believe that Christ lives. He died on Good Friday and went back to life on Easter. “He went ahead of us to Galilee. We will see him there as he said.