

HOMILY ON OCCASION OF JUBILEE MASS FOR RELIGIOUS
50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, CATHEDRAL OF ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

Dear Archbishop John Favalora,
Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Risen Lord:

A priest friend of mine tells the story of a young man who told him that he was not sure exactly what the resurrection of Christ meant. What exactly was the claim of the Church by saying that Jesus “rose” from the dead, he asked him. Surely, he claimed, it was not to be taken literally.

Seeking to express in simple words the best theological insights he could remember, my friend explained what the Church meant by the resurrection from the dead of Jesus. When he finished, there were tears in the eyes of the young man, and looking intensely at my friend, he said: “Father, if what you say is true, everything changes! Everything changes! Suddenly I’d be living in another world! Everything in it is different. Even if it looks the same. That tree there, those clouds, that greasy dinner on the corner, the bus going by...everything, everything would be different. It would be wonderful.” My friend was struck by the power of the young man’s recognition of the implications of believing in the resurrection of Christ. After a couple of minutes of silence, the young man looked at my friend again with an anxious look, and he said: “Everything would be different...but where is the evidence that it did happen? Where is the evidence in our world now, in this world as it is, that the resurrection of Jesus did happen?”

My fellow religious and friends in the Lord, how would you reply to this question? It is a question that the world today asks of us. We must be prepared, as St. Peter wrote, to “give an account for the hope that is in us,” that is, we must explain why we believe what we believe. We are called to a New Evangelization, and this means that we cannot take for granted the strength of the faith of our communities today. We should not take for granted the certainty with which many adhere to the faith of the Church today, even when we see evidence of an increase in religiosity. What and where is the evidence for the truth of what our faith reveals to us?

According to our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, this relation between faith and reason is the most important topic for the Church in the twenty-first century, when the Gospel is being opposed by a reduction of religious experience to psychological – and even biological – phenomena. We cannot be deceived by an apparent rise in religious interest, or by cultural attitudes that may have been

born in a strong faith, but which are now not much more than folklore. The young man's question about the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus cuts across all of this subjectivist interpretation of the faith and raises its most important characteristic: faith is not a matter of feelings, dreams, and illusion. Faith is a response to facts. Faith is a form of knowledge of the truth.

Therefore the young man's question must be answered by pointing to a fact, to a concrete place where something happens about which one can say: "Here is the evidence for the resurrection of Christ."

Moreover, as the young man realized, the resurrection of Jesus is something unlike anything else in this world. It is so different and so new that this world does not remain the same as it was before. The evidence for the truth of the resurrection is, must be, a presence in this world with its origin in another world beyond the possibilities of this world. It must be a life stronger than death, a life that is not subject to the law of corruption and death to which every life that originates in this world must submit.

My dear brothers and sisters, the Catholic Church believes that this way of life, the way of life of the resurrection, is the life of the Church herself. The evidence of the resurrection is the Church as way of life that surpasses all the possibilities of this world. More precisely, the evidence for the resurrection is the existence in this world of a communion of life, love, and truth that is more powerful than the law of corruption and decay that makes it impossible for us to live the life for which we were created.

And what exactly is that life for which we were created like?

The Answer is the Beatitudes, which we have just heard. Sisters and brothers, if you have not already done so, permit me to urge you to read carefully the section on the Beatitudes in the recent book by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, called "Jesus of Nazareth." The Holy Father shows how the subjects of the Beatitudes – those who are "blessed" – are those "poor" to whom the first Beatitude is addressed, those who have left everything to follow Jesus. They have left everything because Jesus is sufficient for us, for all human beings, because only Jesus can satisfy the desires of the heart. This is the famous "remnant" of Israel revealed in the Old Testament as the faithful people of God. (Recall our first reading today!) The Beatitudes point to a way of life together, a way of living together as a people belonging to God, where a divine love embraces human love and protects it from the destruction of death.

All of us are called to this way of life and love. This is the life of the Church. The life of the resurrection is anticipated, revealed, and lived in this world as a sign, a testimony, a witness of what is to come when Christ's victory over sin and death is fully manifested. All of us are called to this life and empowered to do so by

baptism and the sacraments. Although all of us are called to this life of the Beatitudes, some are called to live it by clearly dispossessing themselves of everything in order to show that Jesus Christ is sufficient. His grace is sufficient. He is "all in all." It is here that we discover the secret of the vocation to a so-called "religious life," in the Church, the life of the vows or promises, the life of virginity for the sake of the kingdom, of poverty, and obedience. Today we are celebrating and thanking the Lord for the countless blessings he has brought to the Church in the Archdiocese of Miami by this presence, witness, and apostolic work of the women and men religious that have offered their lives visibly and clearly to show all of us how we must all be "in the heart," and to proclaim to the world the resurrection of Christ and the power of his beauty. Without their presence and their witness, the Church in Miami would not have the strength to demonstrate the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Thank you, beloved religious, for the witness of your sacrifice of love and the beauty of the diversity of the charisms of your communities which build up the Church and are a source of countless blessings for humankind, especially the people of God in this local church. Indeed, this Eucharistic Celebration is a sign of how deeply grateful your Archbishop, the priests, deacons and faithful of this archdiocese are to God for you, especially for your perseverance in the midst of so many challenges in today's world so heavily marked by secularism, relativism, consumerism, and excessive individualism and sensuality. At this difficult historical juncture thank you for your witness as consecrated women and men religious. We thank you for your fiat! We thank you for being living Gospels of the hope and joy that are ours in Christ Jesus!

We thank the Lord for you! We praise the Lord on account of you! Finally, let us pray that many will hear the Lord calling them to your way of life, the consecrated way of religious life, the life of the Church in all its clarity and power, the life of redeemed humankind, the evidence of the resurrection: the Joy and Peace of the Risen Lord shining through you!