

## 4.5.2026 Easter Day

*“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women. Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:1-6).*

We live in a fear-filled world. At nearly every turn we seem to be confronted with another reason to feel anxious about today or uncertain about tomorrow, but in this Gospel text we learn that those who *seek Jesus who was crucified* need not fear, for *He is risen*. The Easter message that was proclaimed by an angel of the Lord to the women who came first to the empty tomb stands in sharp contrast to the message received by the guards who'd been assigned to secure the tomb, guards who *shook for fear of him, and became like dead men*, and it's this contrast that I'd ask you to consider on this Easter morning - the great gulf that exists between the peace of God found in those who *seek Jesus who was crucified*, and the fear experienced by those who've turn their back on Him.

Picture the events leading up to that first Easter Day. St. Matthew tells us that the guards were placed at the tomb because the chief priests and Pharisees approached Pilate on Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, and asked him to provide a guard to secure the tomb. They broke their own legalistic demands for sabbath rest because they were concerned that the disciples might remove our Lord's body and then claim that Jesus had risen on the third day as He'd promised, and isn't it interesting to note that because our Lord kept His promise, fulfilled every prophesy, and rose to new life, their ill-conceived plan backfired miserably. All of their work to secure the tomb with a stone, a Roman seal, and guards appointed by Pilate, ensured that no thief, no heartbroken disciple, no man or woman could've removed the body of our Lord. Therefore, when the tomb was found empty on Easter Day, the foolproof measures taken to secure the grave became just one more piece of

historical evidence for the truth of the Resurrection.

Now, let's consider these guards. With the tomb entirely secure, there's no question that their full attention would've been pointed away from the grave's entrance. It would've been focused in an outward direction, because what we all know from reason, they knew from personal experience, that crucified, dead, and buried men stay that way. The dead remain dead, and so from a human perspective no threat would've come from within the tomb, and further, even a man fully alive and in perfect health wouldn't have been able to roll the stone away and exit the grave. So, the guards' attention was pointed away from Jesus. They'd turned their back on Him, believing His kingdom was ruined, His power was spent, His glory was that of a crucified criminal - dead and buried.

The guards had turned their back on Jesus, and in doing so they'd turned their back on God, and therefore when the angel of the Lord appeared in this collision of heaven and earth, as the supernatural intruded into the natural world, they were so filled with fear that they became like dead men, and most certainly the women who'd come to anoint the body of our Lord were frightened as well, and not only at the appearance of the angel. After walking with our Lord on the Way of the Cross and witnessing first-hand the unimaginable brutality of His Passion and Death, to their weary, broken hearts it must've seemed as if all was lost, that the entire world was against them, but listen once more to the comfortable words St. Matthew is careful to tell us that the angel said to these women, and to them alone. Matthew writes, *"But the angel answered and said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen..."*

Those who act like guards at the tomb, who turn their back on Jesus by living as if God were dead and buried are in danger of becoming like those guards, so filled with fear that they're *like dead men*. However, in sharp contrast, those that *seek Jesus who was crucified* are told by God's messenger, an angel of the Lord, *"Do not be afraid."* So, in this anxious and fear-filled world I'd ask you to reflect on this example from the first Easter Day and consider the question: Who do you seek? In what direction is your life oriented? Is Jesus silent because like a guard at the tomb you've turned your back on Him by fixing your eyes only on this world, or are you like those

faithful women whose love for the Lord motivated them to rise early in the morning, *while it was yet dark*, to seek Jesus who was crucified, devoted women, who upon arriving at the tomb would've met the guards face to face, because instead of turning their back on Jesus, their heartfelt desire in their pain, distress, and fear on that first Easter Day was to come to Him.

*"Come unto Me,"* our Lord said, *"all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). To all who seek Him crucified, Jesus offers the gift of His peace, saying, *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* (John 14:27). The guards hearts were troubled and afraid, they shook in fear and became like dead men because they'd turned their back on the only Source of true peace, but by the grace of God the faithful women who came first to the tomb, and Christians in every generation from that day forward have heard and received the message of the angel: *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified."*

In the midst of an anxious, fear-filled world the message of Easter is peace and rest, because by the grace of God those who seek Jesus who was crucified, like these women, will find Him risen. God is not dead and buried. He is Risen to new and everlasting life, and the reason we still seek our crucified Lord is the same reason St. Paul preached Christ, *"and Him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 1:23), the reason he resolved to know nothing *"except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:2). The reason we, like the faithful women and St. Paul, seek and preach and strive to know nothing except Jesus and Him crucified is because God has shown us that the path to eternal glory is by Way of the Cross. The Cross is the path to eternal glory because it is the only bridge from this transitory life to our Lord's Risen life, an abundant life of peace and rest in communion with God - Father, Son, and Spirit, a life that those who love and seek Him are, by grace through faith, given to live today.

We will certainly experience feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and fear in this world, but the message of Easter to those who *seek Jesus who was crucified* is: *Do not be afraid*. So, by the grace of God, may we follow the example of the faithful women whose love for Jesus compelled them to seek our crucified Lord early in the morning, to the end that we may find Him risen,

and evermore live with Him in the peace, rest, and joy of His Resurrected life.