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Parochial Vicar, St. Michael the Archangel

5th Sunday of Easter – Year A (May 10, 2020)

Christ is risen!

Jesus begins today's gospel reading by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." In the forty days after the Resurrection, He repeatedly tells his disciples, "Be not afraid." It is natural for us to be afraid. God designed us to move away from those things that might cause us harm. In the same way, He designed us to be attracted to those things which are good for us. But in Paradise, everything got twisted around. The beauty of the forbidden fruit and the lies of the serpent twisted the desire of Adam and Eve, making them ignore the prohibition, and so they chose to pursue that which was deadly to them. The immediate result was that they became afraid of one another and of God and so hid themselves. They recoiled in fear from the persons who were truly good for them. To this day we carry the burden of being afraid or desiring the wrong things in the wrong order. The serpent had planted in us distrust of God—distrust that He actually cares for all our needs and wishes to deliver us from death. And so, with our trust stolen from us, we succumb to the fear of death. We continually try to quiet this fear in us by feeding our desires, but this behavior only makes the problem worse. We drive ourselves into our graves. As the great Arcade Fire sang, "You always fall for what you desire or what you fear!"

People have long known instinctually that the easiest way to control people is to manipulate their desires and fears. Really, this is the basis of all manipulation, wherever it is found. Thanks to modern psychology, we understand the principle even more clearly, and unscrupulous people who desire power use it to their advantage. The more people live for pleasure and avoid suffering, the easier they are to control. In a society that rejects God, this is the only way to keep order. As long as we live lives of sin, we submit ourselves to this kind of manipulation. But we who belong to the divine society of the Church must not allow ourselves to be subject to this kind of control. Jesus Christ died and rose again to deliver us from this fate. He came to foster in us the confidence and trust in him that we lost through sin. As St. John says, "Perfect love casts out fear." He came to give us "the glorious freedom of the Sons of God".

This means we must pursue virtue. We must train ourselves with the help of grace. We need to deny ourselves of things we enjoy, and we must embrace things which we fear. If we do not, we are slaves. In this time, there is much uncertainty about the future. Uncertainty produces anxiety and can put us in a position of falling, so we need to make extra efforts to put our confidence in God. Only then will we see clearly to navigate the course ahead of us. Ignore scare tactics and carrots on sticks—those are meant for slaves. For freedmen, prudence and righteousness are the guides. And when we are in trouble and falling for our fears or desires, let us call on the Lord Jesus Christ, the stone and bedrock of our faith. St. Peter tells us: "For it says in Scripture: *Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.* Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall.* They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny." Therefore, let our destiny be glorious, let us move forward in confidence, not stumbling, and rejoice in the mercies of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.