

## In Nomine Iesu

### *Quasimodogeniti*, the First Sunday after Easter 2022

#### **The titanic struggle is finished, the rescue continues - John 20:19-31**

“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Martin Luther was once asked which vocation he would have chosen if he could not have been a pastor and teacher. He replied: He would choose historian. History can teach us valuable, even life-saving lessons, if only we pay attention to it.

#### I

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Easter, 6:30 P.M., Cyril Evans, radio operator on the freighter *SS Californian*, westbound from London to Boston, began tapping out a Morse code warning to ships in his vicinity to warn them of three large icebergs 20 miles north of his position of 42 degrees, 3 minutes north, 49 degrees, 9 minutes west. Among the ships in the north Atlantic who heard his warning was the *Royal Mail Ship (RMS) Titanic*, westbound on her maiden voyage from Southampton, England to New York. On the *Titanic* senior radio operator John George Phillips delivered the warning to the bridge at 10:20 P.M., **immediately after he first heard it**. Captain Edward John Smith ordered his lookouts to watch out for ice. The sea was dead calm, the calmest many had ever seen in the North Atlantic.

*Titanic*'s original 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, David Blair, had been left in England because Captain Smith had brought aboard his former executive officer, Henry Wilde, to take over that position on *Titanic*. In consequence William Murdoch went from Executive to 1<sup>st</sup> Officer and Charles Lightoller from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>. And Lightoller had no key to the ship's binoculars locker, because Blair had forgotten to turn it over to him. So, *Titanic*'s lookouts had no binoculars that fateful night.

At 10:21 the *Californian* herself was stopped at 50 degrees, 7 minutes west, having steamed into heavy pack ice drifting south in the Labrador current. So, Evans began

sending out still more urgent ice warnings. By 11:00 Evans' signal was so strong that Phillips on the approaching *Titanic*, trying to transmit dozens of private messages of their passengers to the radio station at Cape Race, Newfoundland, now just 800 miles away, could no longer hear the station over the powerful signal from *Californian*. Exasperated he tapped out, "**Shut up, shut up. I am working Cape Race.**" So, aboard *Californian*, Evans stopped transmitting and just listened.

At 11:40 *Titanic* struck an iceberg. When the extent of damage was clear, Captain Smith ordered Phillips to begin sending the **distress signal, CQD**, the equivalent of today's **SOS**. *RMS Carpathia*, eastbound from New York, heard the signal, contacted *Titanic* at 12:11, as Captain Arthur Rostron immediately altered course for *Titanic*, ordering *Carpathia* to full speed, 17 knots. He was 58 miles away. *Californian*, only **15 miles** away, heard nothing, because Evans, **having been told to "shut up,"** had turned his set off ten minutes before unsinkable *Titanic*, pride of the White Star Line, struck the iceberg. *Titanic's* struggle to survive would not last long.

Racing through dangerous ice fields, *Carpathia* arrived at 4:00 A.M. to find *Titanic* gone and only lifeboats remaining. Of the 2227 souls aboard *Titanic*, *Carpathia* would deliver to New York only 710 who managed to get into the lifeboats. ***Titanic* had not seen the danger. *Californian* could not hear the cry for help. *Carpathia* could only save some of *Titanic's* people.**

## II

Today, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Easter, is 110 years from that First Sunday after Easter in the year of our Lord 1912, when *RMS Titanic* struck the iceberg and began her losing struggle. Today's Gospel, the historic gospel for the Sunday after Easter was what the passengers of *Titanic* who attended ship's chapel heard on the morning of that fateful day. In it, John picks up the account of the resurrection of the Christ where Mark left it Easter Sunday. John did so because Christ didn't endure **His titanic struggle** with sin, death, and hell only to leave people alone, fearful, and dying. No, He was raised to life again to save all who would hear and believe word of His victory.

Remember the pattern of God's interaction with man revealed throughout the Bible: **God promises life in the face of death. Man doubts and falls away in unbelief**, not seeing the threat of death, not hearing the cries for help of the dying, not able to save himself or others from death. But then God fulfills His promise, and seeks man once again. And people believe once more, and are saved. We find that same pattern here. John records what Jesus promised His disciples the night He was betrayed. He said: **"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."** (John 14:18) Still, they had all doubted and run away in fear. But Jesus rose from death on Easter in fulfillment of all He had promised, and then set about seeking His lost, fearful, and hopeless sheep. He found them, spoke to them, and they believed. They were rescued.

When Jesus appeared to His disciples in the locked upper room on the first Easter evening, He did so in order to save them, to deliver **to them** what He won **for them** by His suffering and death. He came so that for them – and us – His titanic struggle against sin and death, death that had claimed so many since Adam's fall into sin, would not end in destruction for all. He came to proclaim to His fearful disciples, as Paul would later say, "the foolishness of the cross." He had, as it were, raced to them through seas made perilous by unseen dangers, having heard the cry of their heart, their cry for help in time of trouble, fear, and death.

This is exactly what the Christian church has done for centuries with its pattern and practice of worship. It takes the foolish **message of the cross** that the world so often scorns and neglects in its hurry to get where it is going – like *Titanic*, so busy sending and receiving messages of little enduring value – like *Titanic*, whether by Morse code or cell phone, and delivers it **clearly and plainly** to all who gather in Jesus' name to be in His saving presence.

In this 110th anniversary year of the *Titanic* tragedy it is fitting that we take note that the part of the church building where we gather is called the “nave.” **“Nave” is from the Latin word for boat.** Here in the nave the sign of the cross is made before the eyes of the worshipers as they hear, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Everything that follows builds on that sign of the cross, that Christ there entered into a struggle with all the powers of hell in order **to destroy death** and hell. The sins we confess here to our gracious God, are the very sins Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, carried to Calvary's cross and died for in our place, so that we would receive mercy for His sake. Sunday after Sunday we return to this lifeboat, this nave, to hear God's promise, and its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Christ.

In other words, we stop rushing about as the world does, stop yelling “shut up, shut up,” and just follow Christ's life, even as His disciples once walked in His footsteps to hear His words and see His deeds. We hear it explained in plain, simple language. And then we receive the life-giving Sacrament of Christ's body and blood, so that we may know that He has kept His promise, that **He has not left us orphans in this world of sin and doubt; He has not left us adrift in the night of sin on a cold and empty sea, but comes to us out of the darkness lights ablaze to find us, to bring us forgiveness, life, and salvation.** At the end of the service, we hear His words of peace and blessing as we prepare to return to our homes and work, families and neighbors, and we see once more the **sign of the crucified One** set before our eyes.

In worship Jesus Christ our Lord comes to us in the **here and now** even as He once came to the eleven, minus Thomas, on that first Easter evening **there and then.** Jesus comes seeking each of us in our doubts, fears, and guilt. He comes speaking words of peace and forgiveness, that we may believe and be comforted, that we may know that our sins have been taken away – as far as the east is from the west – because He took our place on Calvary's cross. He entered into titanic struggle with death and hell, but then, **unlike the *RMS Titanic*, rose from the cold depths of death,** proving that the full price was paid for the sins of all. When Paul said, “We preach Christ crucified,” this is what his words mean. This is what the Christian church has been doing all of the Sundays that have followed that very first Easter.

+++

It is difficult to imagine the shock and horror of those who floated in lifeboats in the dead calm of the icy north Atlantic when the lights of mighty *Titanic* went out, and just minutes later slipped beneath the waves with the roar of escaping air, leaving only empty silence. It is not so difficult to imagine the powerful relief and joy that flooded into the hearts of those shocked and terrified survivors as the lights of the *Carpathia* hove into sight, slowed, and then began moving purposefully toward each lifeboat, and gently but swiftly pulling each of the 710 cold, stunned souls to warmth and safety aboard. Dear friends, may we each - **may we all!** - know that same relief and joy every Sunday in the “nave” of Christ's beloved church as we hear that our Lord has pulled us out of death's sullen grip to salvation and life. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**