

“Trust, Courage, and Confidence”

Easter Sunday Sermon 2025, Bishop Gerhard Feige

(Acts 10:34a, 37–43 / Colossians 3:1–4 / John 20:1–18)

“On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.” This is the perspective from which the evangelist John allows us to experience Easter morning in today’s Gospel reading. The first effects of Jesus’ resurrection are far from comforting. The stone is gone. The tomb is empty. Mary is confused and weeps. Similar reactions—fear and dismay—are shared by all who are confronted with this event, as the New Testament repeatedly testifies. There is no initial talk of hope or confidence. The present and the future are thrown into question. How can life possibly go on?

Isn't that a familiar feeling for us today as well? More than just a few years ago, many people are increasingly worried about the growing disruptions and turmoil in nearly all areas of life—concerns about war and peace, justice and compassion, decency and dignity, social security and societal cohesion. Problems have always existed, of course, but now it feels as though everything is spiraling out of control, overwhelming us entirely. Uncertainty is palpable everywhere.

In such a situation, populists find it easy to stir up emotions and incite people further—that is precisely their strategy. With loaded terms and slogans like “welfare tourism,” “Germany is abolishing itself,” “the downfall of the West,” or “oppression of free speech,” “exploding crime rates,” and “the worst economic crisis ever,” they latch onto people’s fears and amplify them. “Yes,” they want us to believe, “your fear is justified; the present and the future look bleak. Only we can save you from this.” History has clearly shown us how easily fearful people gravitate toward simple answers. We see this today as well: a world that is deeply complex is increasingly being met with ideological slogans, isolationism, nationalism, deportations, and tariffs.

By contrast, what we celebrate in these days is not a simple answer to life in all its complexity. Easter is a challenge—especially because it includes Good Friday and Holy Saturday. If even we find the Passion narratives difficult to bear, how much more painful must it have been for Mary and the disciples who stayed until the bitter end at the cross, or for those whose eyes were opened at the very moment of Jesus’ death? And then the tomb is empty, and Mary Magdalene—who had walked alongside Jesus for so long—no longer recognizes him.

No, the Christian message does not offer us simple answers. Nor does it smooth over the rough edges of life. On the contrary: in the writings of both the Old and New Testaments, life appears in all its facets—even at its deepest lows. But this is not meant to instill fear. Instead, it is meant to awaken trust that every person is unconditionally loved by God, possesses inalienable dignity, and can hope for a future that will never end. Encouraged and inspired by the message of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, we too should not become prophets of doom or call for decline, but rather meet the many fears and hardships of our time with courage and hope. After all, as the Würzburg Synod aptly stated in 1975, “the world does not need a

duplication of its hopelessness through religion; if anything, it needs and seeks the counterbalance—the explosive power of lived hope. And what we owe the world is this: to make up for the deficit of hope that is visible and lived.”

What we celebrate at Easter is a declaration and a call to life—a life in abundance. Such a life does not thrive through isolation and exclusion but wherever there is movement, renewal, and encounter. Today’s Gospel gives us examples of this. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, she runs to the disciples, and they too run to the tomb, bend down, take a closer look, and eventually return home. They are in motion and engaged in encounter. Mary turns toward Jesus, and he calls her to go and share the message of his resurrection. There is an unstoppable dynamic in this moment—even Mary cannot hold on to it. “Do not hold on to me,” Jesus says to her. Life is movement. What we have cherished cannot be preserved in amber, no matter how much some might wish or demand it. Life constantly brings change. And yes, that can be unsettling. But we can also face it with hope and confidence. This is the invitation of Easter: paralyzing fear and death are overcome—they do not have the final word. The “yes” to life is stronger than fear.

Trust, courage, and confidence grow slowly and take time. The Risen One appears several times to his disciples. He even walks with two of them on the road to Emmaus and reveals himself again in the breaking of the bread. What truly sustains us, what gives us stability and opens up a future, is not found in simple answers or quick solutions. Easter, too, is not a one-day event. We celebrate this mystery for fifty days, from Easter through Ascension to Pentecost. And ultimately, every Sunday is seen as a small Easter, as the Church invites us year-round to come closer to the mystery of death and resurrection and to grow into the hope Easter offers.

“Go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” This is what the Risen One instructs Mary to do. Go and tell them, proclaim the Easter message, which can offer a different and hope-filled perspective in the face of fear and confusion.

So let us not be paralyzed in the face of the troubles of our time, but rather trust in the message of life that is already promised to us now and will one day be fulfilled. The hope of not ending in nothingness when we die, but of having a future—personally and communally—in God’s eternity, is liberating, empowering, and uplifting. Those who can believe this will not retreat into private isolation, but instead strive to creatively shape human coexistence and society. In this sense, Easter is a joyful promise and a powerful call to a life of connection, courage, trust, and confidence.

So let us—touched and filled by this mystery, just as Mary Magdalene was—joyfully proclaim and join in the Easter praise of the Church around the world:

“The Lord is risen—He is truly risen. Alleluia!”