

## **“Let no one fear death”**

*He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.... (1 Peter 3:18-19).*

As we enter Holy Week reflecting on Jesus' passion and anticipate the joy of Easter. I'm reminded of one of the most well-known historic Easter sermons. It was written by John Chrysostom 1600 years ago and captures the movement from death to life that we ponder in this week. The writer of 1 Peter suggests that between the crucifixion and resurrection something else took place. Christ descended into hell to save those imprisoned by death. Since the earliest days of the church, artists have depicted Christ's descent into the bowels of the earth to grasp the hands of those chained by death in order to raise them to life. The oldest versions of the Apostles' Creed include the affirmation "he descended to the dead." Even now in Greek Orthodox churches on Easter Sunday morning, a banner depicting Christ's descent sways at the head of the liturgical procession; and at the climax of the Easter liturgy John Chrysostom's stirring sermon is read. It ends this way:

Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free.  
He has destroyed it by enduring it.  
He destroyed Hell when He descended into it.  
He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh.

Isaiah foretold this when he said,  
"You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."  
Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with.  
It was in an uproar because it is mocked.  
It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed.  
It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated.  
It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive.

Hell took a body, and discovered God.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.  
It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.

O death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated!  
Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!  
Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!

Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;  
for Christ having risen from the dead,  
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!

The descent to the dead is a joyful proclamation that there is no place we can find ourselves beyond the reach of the life-giving, life-redeeming power of God – no place we can go that God has not been – no place that God is not with us and for us.

Blessings to you and yours as we move through this holy time,  
Vicki