

# A New Heart and a New Spirit

INTO YOUR HANDS | *Archbishop Robert G. Casey*

Consider the tomb. Think about a tight, closed-off space without the fresh air of a new day. Consider the cold, stagnant darkness of that space, with no possibility of seeing the first light of a sunrise. Think about the lifeless silence that surrounds you, with no hope of hearing the chirping of birds and the chatter of creation at dawn.

Reflecting on the notion of being entombed after death might provide perspective on the current state of our life above ground. For we know that from time to time in life, we may find ourselves feeling lifeless, disheartened, and hopeless. We may find ourselves alone, cut off from others and the world around us, and confined to breathe only the stagnant air of our sad state of life or the unfortunate state of the world.

How do we free ourselves from those tomb-like moments in life? One opportunity comes at Mass, when we pray the Confiteor (“I confess...”) and seek God’s love and mercy for those times when we have found ourselves restricted, isolated, and closed off by our thoughts and our words, by what we have done and what we have failed to do. The stale air of sin and sadness must be replaced by the fresh air of a new day and a renewed life.

However, we often discover a great stone fixed between us and the fresh air we long to breathe. That stone, stubborn and immovable, prevents us from engaging with the world around us in healthy and life-giving ways. That stone holds us back from joining in the song of creation at the dawn of a new

day. If we hope to embrace Christ's call to discipleship, we must get that bothersome boulder out of the way.

It is utterly impossible for us to roll away the stone on our own. Yet, what may be impossible for us is not impossible for God. The new life we long for, the possibility for renewed relationships, and the potential to transform our weary world and renew God's creation, all become possible when we surrender ourselves to God.

Our God is an awesome God, who does not abandon us to the darkness of the tomb but instead frees us from its confines. We see this clearly in the story of Jesus that we proclaim each Easter. After so much pain and sorrow, Jesus' body was laid in a tomb. The Son of God surrendered unto death and succumbed to the darkness and silence of the tomb. But, in an early morning's light, the tomb is found empty and Christ is found alive and present in the light of a new day.

The soldiers who kept watch over the tomb by night did not remove the stone. The disciples who had fearfully hidden in the upper room did not remove the stone. The faithful women who went to the tomb that morning did not remove the stone.

For them, as for us, it was impossible to get the stone out of the way. But not for God. The prophet Ezekiel reveals God's desire for us; God says to us, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez 36:26).

In the holy season of Easter, may we be attentive to our surroundings. If we find ourselves buried under a rockslide of doubt and despair, with hearts hardened and hope waning, may we not hesitate to

call upon God. May we hear God's voice, harden not our hearts, and allow God to remove all barriers between us and the dawning of a new day of peace, joy, and love.

May God bless you and your family with a joyous Easter!