

Born in 1725, the English poet and clergyman John Newton had a checkered past.

His mother died when he was 6. And at the ripe old age of 11, he went to sea. In his youth, he often took extreme risks that brought him close to death. He would for a time examine his relationship with God, but eventually relapse into his former habits.

He eventually denounced his faith, and mocked those who believed. His problems with authority as a sailor caused him repeated difficulties. He was renowned for writing obscene poems and songs about his ship's captain, mocking him in front of the other sailors. One can easily imagine the severe punishments he endured for his insubordination.

While navigating a violent storm in the North Atlantic, Newton – whose talent with obscenity made even the other sailors blush – in trying to save the ship cried out:

If this will not do, then Lord have mercy upon us!

Even Newton was amazed at these words coming from his own mouth.

Two weeks later, battered and starving, the ship limped into port.

Newton penned the first verse of a well-known hymn that begins:

Amazing grace / how sweet the sound / that saved a wretch like me.

And the rest, of course, is history.

Today we celebrate and proclaim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Indeed, He is truly risen.

In the Gospel, we heard that the women, upon entering the empty tomb,
were utterly amazed.

The word used here in the New Testament's original language is ἐκθαμβεῖσθε which has many layers of meaning: amazement and astonishment ... as well as alarm and terror. So, imagine an emotion somewhere between amazement and terror ... or maybe something that flips back and forth.

Having been a sailor myself, I can imagine a few colorful turns of phrase ... from which I will spare all of you.

Today we celebrate ... commemorate ... and recall the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Yesterday, the church was stripped of nearly

all decoration. The statues were veiled from sight. The only image to lay our eyes on was a crucifix ... the image of Our Lord subjected to the most gruesome death imaginable.

Astonishing? Terrifying? Indeed.

And the Resurrection most likely has a similar effect.

Saint Paul reminds us that:

*[J]ust as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
we too might live in newness of life.*

And,

*If, then, we have died with Christ,
we believe that we shall also live with him.*

This should amaze us. Astound us. Alarm us. Even terrify us.

Because the majority of us in this building have been Baptized. And for Jill and Tiffany – who will soon be baptized – the grace of God will be poured out on them in a new and amazing way.

Then they, along with Amy will be Confirmed in the Power of the Holy Spirit.

And for the first time, they will join with us at the altar and receive Jesus Christ – Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

Amazing grace ... Astounding grace ... Alarming grace ... Terrifying grace.

As we continue in this Easter liturgy ... and as we all soon renew our own Baptismal promises. Let us recognize that we have all been transformed in Christ ... something which is both amazing and terrifying. May the graces of the Easter Sacraments be renewed in our hearts ... our minds ... and our souls.

So that, renewed in Christ, we may show forth the Power of that Grace in our daily lives.