Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Only in Matthew's Gospel are we told who rolled away the stone that covered Joseph of Arimethea's burial cave, in which the body of the crucified Jesus had been laid. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone, and sat on it." (Mt 28:2) The other evangelists simply report that the stone had been removed and that Jesus was gone. The angel in Matthew's account then speaks words of comfort, assurance, and direction to the two Marys, filling the emptiness of their hearts with hope.

These centuries later, on Easter Day the emptiness of Good Friday and Holy Saturday is replaced by the same reassurance and expectation. In our churches, images of new life fill the liturgical and spiritual space we left vacant only two days before. Lilies and forsythia decorate the chancel where last Sunday's palms were spread; the altar stripped on Maundy Thursday is adorned with festival vestments and polished silver vessels that will hold the sacramental elements. For most of us, the day will bring comfort and the renewed assurance of God's generosity and grace.

In communities where resources are scarce and freedom limited, the promise of renewed hope is sometimes more deeply embraced, perhaps because the emptiness it meets is more extreme. To those for whom the tomb of death is always near in the form of poverty, oppression, or despair, the liberation to new life delivered by Jesus' resurrection is profoundly yearned for and gratefully welcomed. For them, the angel who roles away the stone is truly a godsend.

In our vocation as Easter people, as followers of the risen Jesus, we are called both to proclaim our own experience of deliverance from evil and paucity of spirit, and to role away the stone for others, that they might experience the same. It is our responsibility, as those who have seen the empty tomb and been to the Galilee to find that Christ indeed is risen, to make the triumph of good over evil come to life for others.

In response to the Resurrection of Jesus, how will you and I roll away the stone to reveal that Christ is alive and bring deliverance from fear and repression to those seeking a new life of freedom and grace? Empowered by Jesus' triumph over death, how will we be angels of God's mercy and justice to the lost, the lonely, and the stranger?

With every Easter blessing,

The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop of Ohio