I. Introduction

Exactly four centuries after the first Easter—in the year 430 A.D.—the French bishop St. Germanus of Auxerre was sent by the Pope to England to help the Christians there overcome the heresy of Pelagianism. This heresy involved the false teaching that we can save ourselves on our own, without relying on the grace of God and the saving death and Resurrection of Christ. While St. Germanus was helping the Church in England correct this mistaken belief, the English Catholics were threatened with an attack by two fierce pagan tribes, the Picts and the Saxons. Knowing the holy bishop had great influence with God, the Catholics begged St. Germanus to accompany their army into battle and pray for divine assistance. He agreed to do so.

It was Easter time, and after celebrating this most important of all feasts, the Catholics set out. Bishop Germanus ordered the soldiers to shout as loudly as possible the word they would hear him use upon encountering the enemy. When the Picts and the Saxons were in sight, arrayed for battle, St. Germanus shouted, “Alleluia! Alleluia!”, and then the entire army cried out, “Alleluia! Alleluia!” The echoes of this word thundered through the hills and valleys, frightening the barbarians, who fled in disorder, giving victory to the Catholics. This actual historical event became known as the “Alleluia Victory”—a victory won without the shedding of a single drop of blood.

II. Development

Today we celebrate another “Alleluia Victory”—though in this case, blood was shed. Jesus died a painful and terrible death on the Cross so that each one of us might be saved from our sins, and He also wishes to share with us the glory of His Easter Resurrection. If we travel under His banner, we need not fear the dangers of life, nor the terrors of death; if we live as an Easter people, we will share in His victory.

III. Conclusion

“Alleluia” means “praise God”—and this is indeed the proper response to the Lord on this glorious feast. The readings speak of the need to celebrate Christ’s victory over sin and death and to share His Good News with others. Peter and the other apostles were commissioned to speak to the people, bearing witness that Jesus alone can forgive our sins; His apparent defeat on Good Friday actually set the stage for His glorious victory on Easter Sunday. As St. Paul says, this makes everything new; this gives us reason to rejoice and be glad. It took some time for the Lord’s disciples to realize this; at first they didn’t understand the meaning of the empty tomb. When they eventually saw the Risen Lord, however, their hearts were filled with joy, and they became capable of witnessing to others. Like Mary Magdalene and the apostles, we too are invited to share in Christ’s Easter victory, and we too are called to express our joy by sharing the Good News with others.
The example of St. Germanus contains a lesson for us today: if we have faith, the presence of the Risen Lord will help us face and overcome the spiritual dangers that threaten and surround us; moreover, our belief in Jesus can strengthen and encourage others. “Alleluia” should be our motto and our attitude toward life—even in these dangerous and uncertain times. Let us spiritually cry out “Alleluia!” as a reminder to ourselves that Jesus has conquered and that, through Him, a new and glorious life awaits us. Our difficulties won’t necessarily go away, but proclaiming this word in our hearts will remind us of what truly matters: Jesus is with us in all our troubles, helping us to bear our crosses with courage and hope, and assuring us of the eternal joy of His Kingdom. The more we praise God, the more His grace and love and mercy will be at work in our lives; the greater our hearts cry “Alleluia!,” the greater will be our peace here on earth and our reward in Heaven.