

Easter Sunday: Resurrection of the Lord C/2007

Today we celebrate the greatest event of our salvation and the founding feast of our faith, that is, the resurrection of Jesus. Debaters may keep asking questions about the resurrection of Jesus, and moviemakers raise polemics about his tomb or his remains, but nothing can destroy the truth, as we find it described in today's readings, that Jesus Christ is alive, that God raised him from the dead.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, there would never have been faith in him, and Christianity would never have existed. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, people would have perhaps talked of him as they do with some historical figures of the history of humanity, like Julius Caesar or Pharaoh, or Chaka Zulu, but that would never have had any impact as it has today on millions and millions of Christians throughout the world.

It is because Jesus Christ is alive that we are gathered here in his name to praise God and thank him for the gift of life he has given us in raising his Son, making him our Lord and our Savior. Peter said it clearly in the Acts of the Apostles: This man who the Jews hung on a tree, God raised him on the third day and granted him to be visible. The apostles are the witnesses of what happened to him. They were with him before and after his resurrection; they ate and drank with him, had heard his teaching and had seen his miracles. They saw him dead, but they saw him also raised. It is that witness which they have transmitted to us so that we, too, may believe and come to eternal life.

The Gospel describes what happened that "first day of the week" and how, when everything seemed to end in failure, God intervened and raised his faithful servant from the dead. Mary Magdalene, Peter and the beloved disciple, who went to the tomb in the early morning, could not believe with their eyes: they are taken by surprise; the Lord is risen. The stone is removed from the tomb; the burial cloths trail on the ground and the tomb is empty. While Mary Magdalene thought, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb", and Peter did not know what to do, John, who saw also, quietly believed.

But what did John see? Nothing else than an empty tomb materialized by the burial cloths. In fact, on Easter Sunday, there is nothing to see; there is only one thing to do, namely to believe that no grave has the power to prevent God's life to spring out and reach us. On Easter morning only faith can make us understand that there is no impassable gap between God and death, that the risen Christ leads us from death to life, making us new creatures pleasing to his Father.

It is only in faith that we can attest to Christ's resurrection. Faith is not an intellectual knowledge about Jesus, or a moral acceptance of the doctrine of the Church, but a personal commitment to make Jesus the Lord of our life and to live out of his words. That is why the resurrection of Christ challenges us to believe in him without seeing him. As St. Peter says: "You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy that words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation, which is the purpose of your faith in him" (1 Peter, 1, 8-9).

What is the true meaning of resurrection? Resurrection means the restoration of a person to bodily life after death. It is not the same thing as the immortality of the soul, since it involves the whole person, body and soul, in a restoration to life. Neither is it the same as reincarnation or resuscitation, since in both cases the person will eventually die again and not be brought back to life. Such an understanding sheds light on Easter as the celebration of life in all its fullness.

In this perspective, Christ's resurrection means that the grave is no more a place where death is closed up behind a rolled stone. The stone of death has been removed forever from the tomb. The risen Christ has destroyed forever the reign of death. He has promoted life and consecrated all those who believe in him to eternal life and to rejoice with him in his kingdom.

For us human beings, Christ's resurrection means that our own physical death is not an obstacle to the flourishing of God's life in us. Like Christ, when we die God gives us life anew, since we believe and are baptized in him. Christ himself makes us participate in his own resurrection. His resurrection is our resurrection. That is the good news of Easter, namely that no matter what we suffer, no matter how badly we have it, no matter what tragedies we face – even death itself – we will be raised up as well. In other words, there is always light for us at the end of the tunnel. There is no more frontier between death and life.

This is not an expression of a blind optimism, but of the strength of faith in Jesus. Of course, we know by human experience that light is often difficult to see, especially when we are overwhelmed with problems and depression. When there seems to be no end to our struggles, when every road we take comes to a dead end, when suffering continues unabated, our inclination is not to believe in light, but to curse the darkness. But it is precisely then, Easter promises, in the darkest night of our situation, that our resurrection is closest at hand. It may take great courage, but Easter pushes us to raise our eyes in hope and wait with trust for our redemption. No matter what we endure, God will raise us up. This is the grandeur of Christianity; the absolute promise of deliverance.

So, we understand that there is a reason for every problem we face, and an important lesson we need to learn in every suffering we endure. If God closes a door, he opens us a window. There is never a Good Friday without its Easter. Easter affirms that we will never be abandoned, that nothing is ever hopeless. Our strength, therefore, in facing our afflictions is not rigid stoicism, or anger at life, or "why me?", or resignation to fate, but patient, peaceful, confident Easter belief that it will be OK. There is a light at the end of tunnel. Happy Easter to all!

Acts 10, 34a. 37-43; Colossians 3, 1-4; John 20, 1-9



Homily Date: April 8, 2007

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Document Name: 20070408homily.pdf