

Easter Sunday A/2008

Today we celebrate the feast of life and the victory of Jesus over death. Today is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest event God has ever performed in human history. It is the founding feast of our faith and of our salvation. Indeed, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, there would never have been faith in him. It is because Jesus is alive that we are gathered in his name to praise God and thank him for the gift of life he has given us by raising his Son from the dead. Christians all over the world rejoice in this wonderful day because the Father did not leave his beloved Jesus in the tomb for ever. By raising him, the Father has made him our Savior and Redeemer.

That is the basic message of Peter in the Act of the Apostles. First of all, Peter reminds the Jews the whole story of Jesus, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit in order to do good and heal the sick. He recalls the wonderful actions he has performed following his teaching through the power of God. However, in spite of the good deeds done, the Jews killed him by hanging him on a tree. 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 of this Easter Sunday describes what happened that “first day of the week” and how, when everything was gloomy and sad, God intervened in a wonderful way and raised his servant Jesus 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. Jesus is risen; Christ is restored to the fullness of life; he is alive.

At that moment on, the disciples understood that the death of Jesus was not at all a defeat, but a victory of life over the forces of Evil. Although they ran away following the arrest of Jesus, and hid themselves for fear of the Jews, they regained confidence. On that big day of the resurrection, everything became clear to them that all that happened to Jesus, with his passion and death, was according to God’s plan. Of course, there was the bloody Good Friday with its tears and emotions, but it was not the end of the episode. Who could resist God’s power to create anew that has been destroyed by death? No; God could but raise his servant Jesus and confirm the truthfulness of his teachings and action. No grave could have the power to prevent God’s life to spring out and reach us. No; Jesus was not a liar; he was truly sent by the Father so that whoever believes in him might have eternal life. All that he said and did came truly from the Father.

In this regard, Christ’ death on the cross was a not mere fate, but a gift of himself to the Father for the forgiveness of sin, and for our salvation. For that, in the resurrection, the Father confirms Jesus as the mediator between heaven and earth, and as the only one in the name of whom salvation is brought to mankind.

By raising Jesus from the dead, at the same time that the Father reveals equally the unique relationship that links him to Jesus, he legitimates Jesus' claim of lordship over the whole universe.

But, in order to approach the risen Lord, we need faith. 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. It is only in faith that we can attest to Christ's resurrection. Faith is not believing without proof, but trusting God beyond any proof. That is why faith in the resurrection of Jesus implies hope, trust, and confidence that even in the worse of a dark night, with God, a dawn is always possible.

In that sense, 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. Like the beautiful plants that emerge from a sown seed, so has the death of Christ brought us life.

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. With the God of Jesus Christ, there is no more frontier between death and life. 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 endure in this life, God will not abandon us in the tomb. He will intervene in our favor because of his faithfulness and fidelity to us. And then, we will understand that we would not have run in vain; we would not have accepted so much sacrifice for the sake of our faith in vain; we would not have lived our Christian commitments with so much courage, determination and abnegation for nothing.

Easter pushes us to raise our eyes above in hope, and wait with trust for our redemption. No matter what we endure, God will raise us up. That is why the resurrection of Jesus challenges us to trust Jesus firmly and hope with eager patience for our redemption. So, we understand that there is 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. Happy Easter to all!

Acts 10, 34a, 37-43; 1 Corinthians 5, 6b-8; John 20, 1-9



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