

Easter Sunday B/2009

Today we celebrate, with the whole Church throughout the world, the founding feast of our faith: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus did not rise, there would never have been faith in him. If Jesus were not alive, there would never have been Christians who proclaim and confess him as the savior of humankind. It is because Jesus is alive that we gather this morning in his name to worship and thank God for the gift of life he has given us by raising him from the dead.

All the readings of this Easter Sunday convey this vital message, that God's life is bigger than the bitterness of suffering and death. God is life and life everlasting. Because God is the master of everything that exists beneath, on earth, and above in the heavens, nothing can prevail before him including death itself. Where God is, there is life. It is that life that God has let beam in his beloved Jesus by raising him from the dead.

In fact, the reason why the Father sent Jesus in the world was that whoever believes in him may not die, but have eternal life. All the ministry of Jesus was oriented to that goal of giving life. That is what St Peter summarizes in his speech before the Jewish people. He reminds them of the beginning of Jesus in Galilee after the baptism from John, how he went all over the country preaching and healing the sick through the power of the Holy Spirit and how he was unjustly put to death. But, God has raised him to life again. In him all the prophecies have been fulfilled. In his name all the people have their sins forgiven.

The apostles are witnesses of all that happened to Jesus from the beginning. They saw his passion and death, but they also saw him risen from the dead. Because of their intimate association with Jesus, God has allowed that Jesus be visible to them so that they bear that witness to us, too. It is that witness of the risen Christ that the Gospel brings to us on this day of the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

Mary Magdala is taken by surprise as she went early in morning to the tomb to fulfill the ritual of the Jewish tradition: "the stone is removed from the tomb". She thought that they had taken the Lord away to an unknown location. But, in truth, the Lord was risen; he was no more among the dead. He was alive as he had promised and as the Scriptures have announced. When Peter came also to the grave, he saw the burial cloths and the empty tomb. What Mary told him was true. The Lord Jesus is not in the tomb. He is risen.

Truly those who crucified him were wrong. God has acquitted Jesus against his enemies. He has acknowledged the veracity of the message he preached to the crowds of his followers. He has given back his life. Yes, God is life. Therefore, those who believe in him will never die; they will live for everlasting life. They will rise from the dead. Christ is the first that the Father raises in order to give us an example that it is possible.

Therefore, life does not finish completely with death. Death is just a transformation of our present human condition. The ultimate meaning of our life lays in the sharing in the resurrection of Jesus. If we live with him, we will reign with him, in the heavenly home where he is already with the Father and the Holy Spirit. However, in order to have access to that divine life, we need faith in Jesus through the witness of the Scriptures and of his first disciples and the Church.

Faith is so important that the other disciple who arrived first at the tomb "saw and believed". But, what did John see? Nothing other than an open and 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 to 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 engagement about the doctrines of the Church. Rather, it is, above all, a personal commitment to dedicate our life to Christ and to live accordingly. Faith is trust in God beyond material proof. If we trust him enough, in spite of our present situation of suffering, we will surely share in his resurrection.

Easter is the celebration of our hope in eternal life. We live by hope that with Jesus the outcome of our life will be different. A man without hope is a dead man, because he has no perspective for the future; a woman without hope is a dead woman, because she does not have any future. The resurrection of Jesus gives us to hope for the future, to believe that we can one day be at peace with God in his kingdom.

That is why 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 symbolized by the place of burial. He has promoted life and consecrated all those who believe in him to eternal life and to rejoice with him in the kingdom of his Father.

For us Christians, 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, as we believe in him and are baptized in him. Christ himself makes us participate in his own resurrection.

Christ is here present among us; he is alive in our midst. Like the disciples who believed in the words of Mary of Magdala, so should we believe in the word of the Gospel that Christ is risen. In order for that to happen, we have to be open to the grace of the Holy Spirit who is able to strengthen the presence of Christ in our hearts and in our community. Many of those who have believed in the words of the Scriptures and in the name of Jesus, their lives have changed; they have made a difference in the world and in the lives of many other people. The same thing can happen to us today.

To celebrate Christ's resurrection is to celebrate with anticipation our own victory over death. As St Paul says, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory". This is not an invitation to despise the world and its tasks. Rather, we should fulfill our tasks with our eyes fixed above where Christ is already in glory. We should be convinced that the fullness of life cannot be achieved only here on earth and without God.

Let us pray that the risen Christ give us his grace to work for life and against the culture of violence and death. I wish to each one of you a blessed feast of Easter!

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



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