

Easter Sunday B/2018

Today we celebrate the foundational event of our faith and the greatest of the events that God has ever realized since the creation of the world, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All the readings of this day convey just one message, namely that Jesus Christ is risen; he is alive and victorious over death. They invite us to celebrate the feast of our salvation with pure hearts, cleansed from any malice and wickedness.

In the first reading, Peter talks to the people of Israel about Jesus by reminding them what his life was from the baptism he received in the Jordan to his resurrection from the dead. It highlights the fact that Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to heal and bring consolation to the oppressed. It describes also his passion and death on the cross as well as his resurrection from the dead. It stresses the duty the apostles had to bear him witness and to tell the world of the marvels of his resurrection and of the forgiveness of sins.

What is behind this text is the truth that Jesus Christ is alive and victorious over death. Another idea is the truth that the passion and death of Jesus are part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. The last idea is related to the duty of witness that the disciples have to give to the world about the resurrection of Jesus.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel as it describes the event of the resurrection of Jesus. First of all, the Gospel starts with the trip of Mary of Magdala to the tomb and her discovery of the empty tomb. Then, it talks about her reaction in alerting Simon Peter and John. After that, the Gospel mentions the reaction of Peter and John and what they did in going to the tomb. The Gospel ends up with their discovery of the empty tomb and their not understanding that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

What can we say about today's feast? Today I want to talk about the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus, in fact, is the foundation of our faith. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, people would certainly remember him as we do with important personalities who have marked the history of humanity, like the Pharaoh of Egypt, Julius Cesar in Italy, George Washington or Abraham Lincoln in USA or Mani Kongo for the Congolese people, etc.

But, all that would just be a chapter in the books of history and nothing more. It is because Jesus Christ is risen that almost two billions of Christians throughout the world believe in him and worship him as savior and Lord. As St Paul says, "If Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain and vain is also our hope in the resurrection of the dead".

In fact all the human signs we find described in the Bible contribute to confirm the claim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Take, for instance, the fact that immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus, his apostles all ran away and hid themselves for fear of the Jews. Even, Simon Peter, who was a leading figure among the apostles, denied him when things became heated. But, a few days later, the same Peter suddenly had the courage to stand up and talk boldly about Jesus, as we heard in the first reading of the Acts of Apostles.

Such a sign shows clearly that something happened that pushed the disciples to change their attitude and talk about Jesus. No. He was risen from the dead. It was his presence that gave them the courage to bear witness and talk openly without fear.

Here is another sign: the empty tomb. In fact, when Mary of Magdala went to the tomb that morning, she did not expect to find it open. In truth, she was motivated by the love of this man who had changed her life and whose teaching and actions had galvanized the whole country. She wanted only to show that she cared for him and wanted to fulfill the requirements of the Jewish tradition by embalming his body.

But, to her surprise, she found the tomb empty and the stone that covered it rolled aside! When Peter and John later came to the same location, they just confirmed what they already knew through the word of Mary: Jesus was not there; he was risen; he was alive. That truth is what we celebrate today, namely that Jesus Christ is risen; he is not in the tomb; God gave him life anew. Those who crucified him thought that it was over with him; but God could not keep him indefinitely in the tomb. He had the last word and raised him.

| In that sense, Easter means that life is bigger than death and God, who is the master of everything, gives life to those who trust him even when humanly speaking there is nothing to hope for. With the resurrection of Jesus, we are assured that the outcome of our life will be different; whatever might be the state of our situation today and all the unresolved problems we are dealing with on a daily basis.

That is why our daily motto should be hope and not fear. Whatever might be the problems we have, we should always keep our hope alive. The resurrection of Jesus compels us to have another look on the reality of death as human phenomenon. In fact, we cannot deny the sadness of the death of our beloved ones, the anxiety it causes us and the void it leaves around us. However, whatever might be its burden on us and the sorrow it brings, death is not an absolute reality, because we die with the hope of something bigger than it.

That is why in the credo we speak of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting as realities we are waiting for. In that sense, life does not finish completely with death. Its ultimate meaning lies in the resurrection of Jesus. Death is just the transformation of our present condition of life. It cannot prevent God's life to flourish in us. Like Christ, when we die, God will give us life anew. He will let us share in the resurrection of Jesus.

That is why the resurrection teaches us that the grave is no more a place where death is closed up behind a rolled stone. On the contrary, the stone of death has been removed forever from the tomb. In that sense, when we celebrate Christ's resurrection, we anticipate our victory over death. As St Paul says, as our life has become conformed to that of Christ, we have died with him and our life is now hidden with him in God. And when he who is our life will appear, then we too will appear with him in glory. Let us keep that hope alive in us and celebrate Easter with joy. May God bless you all! Alleluia!

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

Homily Date: April 1, 2018

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Document Name: 20180401homily.pdf