

Easter Sunday

I take as my text from St. John's Gospel:

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

He is Risen. He is Risen, Indeed!

That's the traditional Easter greeting, and the hymns we sing today truly reflect how wonderful a day it is: “Jesus Christ is ris'n today, our triumphal holy day....” “Welcome, happy morning! age to age shall say...” Yes, what a glorious day this is: Christ is risen.

Today, we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but more than that, in our celebration of this glorious occasion we are affirming something that no other religion can claim: faith in a living God, a loving God, revealed through his personal, tangible interaction with his creation.

We do not celebrate the death of the Incarnate Son of God; we celebrate His being alive, His Resurrection, the co-joining of His Soul with His risen Body, our Lord's triumph over the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

We celebrate the triumph of Perfect Love and Perfect Obedience.

We celebrate the future, not the past, for this day points the way to our eternal life, when we, just as our Saviour did, pass through the gate of death into the heavenly realm to be united with our Heavenly Father.

That terrible moment on the Cross when Jesus gave up the ghost was not an end, but a new beginning, a new dawn, the release of all of God's creation from the bondage of sin.

John's story of the Resurrection is exquisite, running the range of emotions. As we read the passage, the mind's eye can picture the entire scene in detail.

Mary Magdalene and several other women arrive at the tomb in the early morning. Most likely they have come to finish the burial preparation of Jesus' Body. The preparation had been cut short with the approaching Sabbath, only time enough to place the Body in the tomb with the very minimum for burial. Surprised to see the stone rolled away from the entrance, Mary Magdalene runs away to sound the alarm that something has happened. Nearly out of breath when she reaches Peter and John, she exclaims that someone has taken the body of our Lord from the tomb.

Peter and John waste no time running to the tomb, John being the younger arrives first, but only glances in. He waits for Peter, who enters first.

John, true to his reflective nature, though, reads the signs and quickly comes to the meaning of the grave clothes; he observes that the grave clothes are not unwound but lie in such a manner that the Body could not have been removed by human hands: he is first to believe.

Try to imagine what could possibly have been running through the mind of each of those present: Peter, John, Mary Magdalene?

That intense, exciting moment is still present today; indeed, as we come together to celebrate this joyous Easter Morning, we too are caught up in the ecstasy of that moment, just as if it were happening today.

What joy we do celebrate: Christ is risen, Jesus is alive!

What Peter and John, and Mary Magdalene discovered is confirmed when Jesus appears to His disciples.

What the disciples witnessed was not a ghost; it was the risen Lord in the same living Body that had been crucified and buried. There were the marks of the nails in His hands and feet, and there was the pierced side; it was the same body in all respects, except, it had been miraculously transformed.

This transformed Body of the Risen Christ was different; different from ordinary human bodies:

Although capable of eating, Christ in the transformed, resurrected Body did not require food to support life;

The Risen Body was no longer bound by the ordinary laws of space; it could appear and disappear from sight, and could pass through solid matter;

And, this Risen Body was no longer subject to death: it could not die.

Jesus Christ had overcome the grave; he had defeated death; he had defeated evil, as personified by Satan himself.

The renowned Church Father, St. Augustine of Hippo, wrote of the joy of the Apostles, though hesitant, as they came to believe in the Bodily Resurrection. He recounted their Resurrection experiences, especially the occasion when Jesus appeared to them, and asked for food, not that He had any need for food, but to prove to them that His body was real, that He was indeed the Risen Lord.

What would have happened to the Christian Movement over the centuries, if all that was seen of Jesus was a ghost-like appearance?

What about St. Paul, the intellectual and inquisitor that he was: would he have been so suddenly and absolutely converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus if he had not seen the living Person of Jesus Christ? Indeed, it was Paul's witness of the Risen Lord that was paramount in advancing to the world the meaning, and a fuller understanding, of the resurrection.

It is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in a living Body that is the centerpiece of Christianity.

What, then, does the Resurrection mean to us?

We may think of the Resurrection as the Conquest of Death; but for the Christian, it is far more: it is a beginning, not an ending.

While every living thing on this earth experiences death, for the Christian, death is different.

While the body is perishable, and the spirit immortal, a human person is not complete without the co-joining of the two, spirit and body joined together, not that the spirit is a prisoner of the body; rather, each is an integral part of the person. Thus, in the Resurrection, as our Lord was made whole in His Resurrected Body, so we too will be made whole again for eternity.

Philosophers and theologians have often times discussed the question: would death have been different for humankind if we had never sinned? For Christians, this is rather a moot question.

More to the point is that Jesus Christ, when He rose from the dead in a living Body, overcame the power of death, and we, united to Him in this life, share that victory.

Granted, we must die, but the separation of the body and the spirit is not to be permanent for us. The Good News of the Resurrection is that what is rent asunder by death is to be joined together again in Christ Jesus.

Though the ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato, believed in the immortality of the soul, it is the body that gives it expression, identity, and life in the physical world and, in the life eternal, as C.B. Moss says in his book, *The Christian Faith*: “It is the resurrection of the body, not the immortal soul, that is promised to us by the Resurrection of our Lord.”

By His rising from the dead, Jesus Christ overcame the power of Satan. Though created by God as good, not evil, Satan through his own fault became evil, and, with his followers, has induced man to become evil, too.

But Satan's power over us has been broken. We have been reconciled to God by our Lord. This could only come about through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death alone would not have dealt the Devil such a blow; only through the rejoining of the spirit with a living, Resurrected Body could Christ have overcome the evil one.

With the Resurrection came the glorification of our Lord's Manhood. His Body was no longer weak, no longer mortal or corruptible. His Body was glorified; it had become immortal, incorruptible; yet, it was that same Body which was crucified. He retained His Manhood, while being raised to the right hand of God.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a pledge of our own resurrection. What is promised in the Resurrection is not perpetual life as we know it; rather, it is life in union with God. That union begins in this world, in this life, but can only be completed when we pass through the veil.

We begin to experience that union with God each time we come together in corporate worship; each time we partake of the bread and wine which, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, become the Body and Blood of Christ.

We continue to be united with God through our thoughts and actions, our words and deeds, and especially through the giving of ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us.

Through the ever abiding love of God, and faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we can approach that love which St. Paul has described as the completion and perfection of our human nature.

Our Lord took on a perfect human nature, and incorporated us in Himself, thus making us partakers of His Nature. So, gradually our old corrupt nature is rooted out, and the "Risen Nature of Christ takes its place."

Finally, it is on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Church was built. For Christians, the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an absolute Truth; if it were not so, it could have been easily disposed of as a matter of fact. But, rather, it is confirmed through ancient prophecies, Scriptural records, and the spread and triumph of the Church; it is confirmed by the thousands and thousands of men and women who have lived as Christians, and died as martyrs.

This day remains as a truly glorious day for mankind; Jesus Christ has broken the bonds of death; He has won the victory over Satan.

He has shown to us, to all mankind, His love, a love so great that we cannot begin to imagine, and He has shown to us that through Him, we, too, can realize that glorious victory over death, and attain to everlasting life.

"I am the light of the world; I am the truth and the life; I **am** the resurrection."

Christ is Risen. He is risen, indeed!