

THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

EASTER WEEK

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March 27 **What's happened, and what's next?**
A reflection drawn from texts by Dianne Bergant and
Carroll Stuhlmueller
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A reflection based on a sermon by Guerric of Igny
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What's Happened, and What's Next?

A reflection developed from texts by Dianne Bergant & Carroll Stuhlmueller

If you were to visit the grave of a loved one and find it open and the body gone what would you think? No wonder Mary and Peter and John thought someone had taken the body of Jesus. Dead bodies don't just get up and walk away!

Scripture is not interested in what happened to Jesus' body! The Gospels focus on the emptiness of the tomb and on Jesus being alive and "resurrected". The Book of Acts gives us a sermon by Peter on Pentecost emphasizing that Jesus is God's Chosen and now made judge of the living and the dead. He presents himself as witness to the fact of Jesus' "resurrection".

At first Jesus' followers didn't understand what had happened. They began to understand when they met the Risen Jesus. But did they really? We can look for evidence in the fact of the empty tomb, but that doesn't show how it got emptied. We can look for evidence in the disciples' experience of the Risen Jesus, but this sort of "mystical" experience proves something only to the one who has it. We can look to the lives of those who became convinced of Jesus' "resurrection". We can think of the transformation in Peter, or later in Paul; we can think of the huge number of holy people who have lived a life that only makes sense if Jesus has risen. But if we do this then we are likely to get a bit uncomfortable. That will mean that drawing people to believe in the "resurrection" of Jesus depends in a significant way on how we live.

Do you live integrity even in the face of deceit? Do you live dedicated service even in a world filled with selfishness? Do you live patience and understanding even in the face of violence? Do you live forgiveness and reconciliation where there had been none? So what are we to make of this wondrous Day? This is the Day on which we celebrate the fact that Jesus was willing to die for "me". This is the Day we celebrate the life that he shows us we can come to through dying "with him". But we know from examples like those just cited what this is supposed to mean, and we know that in us there is a great deal of the "old person" who has spent much of a lifetime living in a non-Risen way.

We are told: "Cast out the old yeast"; it worked by a kind of corrupting of the dough. So we are told: "Accept the new yeast"; it works by transforming us so we will become "risen" ourselves. That is the process the first followers of Jesus all had to go through. Yeast works from within and transforms everything! We are called to let the Risen Lord Jesus begin transforming us, and the "yeast" is faith that He is Risen and calls us to rise with Him! He has called "me"! Doesn't he have the power to bring about transformation even in "me"? Believe! Begin to live the "new" life Christ offers you.

The Transformation Worked by Resurrection Joy

A reflection taken from a sermon by Guerric of Igny

Blessed and holy are those who share in the resurrection of Christ. He is the first-born from the dead, the model for everyone else, and his resurrection guarantees ours. He shows us his own risen body as a sacrament and exemplar of the two-fold grace he has prepared for us. Through living out the paschal mystery in our daily lives we rise from death in our souls as we will one day be raised in our bodies as well.

By our joyful celebration of this paschal feast we rouse ourselves as from the torpor of sleep. One who feels no thrill of joy, no sense of new life and vigor, no impulse to cry out "The Lord is Risen!" is halfhearted and slothful indeed. In my own case, when I looked upon the dead Jesus I was overwhelmed by a kind of despairing grief. Now, in looking upon the living Lord and God, "my heart and my flesh rejoice", just as Scripture says. That Jesus returns to me from the tomb is no small advantage to faith and gives us no small dividend of joy! I recognize the living God where only a little while ago I mourned someone dead. My heart is in sorrow for Jesus slain, but now that he is risen not only my heart but my flesh rejoice in the confident hope of my own resurrection and immortality.

"I slept and I arose." That's what Christ says. That's why he goes on to say: "Awake and rise from the dead and I, the Christ, will give you light!" My soul was sleeping when the new sun rose from below. Now the grace of the resurrection casts radiance over the whole world. It is a radiance reflected in the eyes of those who have been watching for him since daybreak. They see a dawn that ushers in the day of eternity. This day knows no evening; its sun will never set. Once the sun went down but now, once and for all, the Son has ascended above even the Heavens and has led death captive in its triumphal procession.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!" What does that mean for you? Do you watch daily for the true wisdom? Do you fix your eyes on the doorway through which that Wisdom comes? If, like Magdalen, you keep vigil at the entrance to the tomb you will like her find the one you seek. You will know that what Scripture says of Wisdom applies to Christ. "Wisdom hastens to show itself to those who long for it. Anyone who rises early to seek Wisdom will have no trouble; such a person will find it right at his door!"

While it was still dark Mary came to watch at the tomb. She found Jesus, the one she sought, standing there in the flesh. You will find Jesus too, but you have to see him with the eyes of the spirit. You can be sure to find his spiritual presence if you seek with a desire like hers. He will see your persevering prayer. He will hear you saying with love like Mary's: "My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks for you." It is the psalmist's prayer: "O God, my God, I watch for you at morning light, for my soul thirsts for you!" If you have let your heart expand to receive the joy of Christ's rising, see if you don't also find yourself singing: "In the morning you filled us with your love; we shall exult and rejoice all our days". See if this joy does not begin to work a transformation in your heart, one that will expand to find and transform your entire life.

Let Your Joy Aid Others' Transformation

A reflection based on a sermon by Thomas of Villanova

“Early in the morning on the First Day, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalen came to the tomb.” The holy and glad day of the Lord’s resurrection continues to shine on us. It is the day the Lord has made, the mother of all good days, the beginning of our glory. What response is appropriate? We should thank the Lord Jesus and congratulate one another. It seems clear why we should thank our Lord but for the same reason, we should congratulate one another.

Christ’s victory on the Cross has made him Lord of all—not only due to the agony he bore but due to the humility of his pure obedience. Yes, a new kind of creature is revealed to the ages and it is revealed in the flesh. A race that never existed in the world from the beginning of time has been created. It is the race of the resurrected. That is the best of reasons to congratulate one another as members of that new race.

We now see in Christ the likeness of our future. We gaze on what for us is a hoped for glory already realized in Him. It is our own glory at which we wonder, it is our beauty that we venerate in Christ; it is our resurrection that has begun in Him. It will be brought to perfection in us as we follow Him. Our “root” lives, the root of the vine of which we are and always will be. “I am the vine and you are the branches”, as he himself has told us. The glory and the life of the root pertains to and fills the branches. What is given to the root is preserved in it for all the branches.

Yet if an uncultivated branch is grafted onto a root the fruit of that branch may not be the good fruit of a branch native to that root. We were taken from uncultivated roots and grafted onto the root of the “true vine” and we must allow that life of that root to change and transform us. The true life flows in us and seeks to express itself in our deeds. But we must do all we can to let it cleanse and transform us. Let us not delay our promised resurrection or allow such delay to disturb us. We have received a pledge. The life of our root and head will change our lives.

Christ has arisen from the grave as the firstborn from the dead. The glorious Christ anticipates the time of our future regeneration. There will be many such because Scripture tells us that Christ will be the “first among many brethren”. They will be changed who have borne his image in their life and way of life. All such will be transformed through the humility and obedience of the Cross, even in this mortal life. Christ has earned resurrection for all. But he does not bring about the change by which we actually live the resurrection life without our cooperation. As we congratulate one another we remind one another that we are called to that resurrection life, and so are called to humble service of all who need mercy and support. Our congratulations enable us to remind each other continually of the dignity given us, the glory awaiting us, and the work of transformation which prepares us for that glory. In rejoicing we begin to live for others as Christ has lived for us. Is this not a reason for beginning everlasting gladness now?

Joy Sets People Free

A reflection developed from a text by Hans Urs von Balthasar

The Risen One is absolutely unique. This is theological as well as factual. Just as in Christ the deepest abasement and God-forsakenness was realized so in him is realized the highest possible exaltation. Jesus has known abandonment by God and now knows complete union with God. In the Book of Revelation this is imaged by the slain Lamb upon God's throne. In this we catch a glimpse of the Son's obedience as representation of Trinitarian love—both in itself and for the world. This unique reality tells us that there has been a turning of ages and the foundation of a new world and world order.

Through all the stories in the Gospels about the resurrection and Jesus' appearances runs the theme of the Son's spontaneous self-revelation. We are shown the divine freedom to offer self when and as God chooses. But we are also left free to make our own choice. Will we choose to believe and to follow the One in whom we shall have believed?

The way the Spirit will reveal to us the Son in and through Jesus Christ is always a revelation of glory and wonder. The Risen One has been manifested to us—but not to the entire world, as yet. We have been chosen by God as witnesses to others. The gift of faith to the nations depends on this seemingly so precarious foundation that is our witness. It seems not only daring but a kind of scandal and folly. Jesus was able to make known the hidden God, the God who is faithful to the covenant freely made and freely offered to all. Yet Jesus somehow shares now the hiddenness of God. Yet Jesus has disclosed himself to us.

What do we see when we are shown Jesus? We see his works, the works of love and mercy. We ourselves experience this love and mercy. They are intended to reveal to us the goodness and beauty of God and God's Trinitarian love. We are to be witnesses to this goodness and beauty. How are we to do that? Just as Jesus did it—by our works. They are to be works that do not and cannot come from us but have to come from the God whose power and beauty manifest themselves in our weaknesses and disfigurements.

When we do see beauty and mercy in a work, especially in one that seems beyond our mere human capacity to accomplish, aren't we lost in wonder? Doesn't one who sees such a work think: "How marvelous! If only I could do likewise!" That reaction sets the other free, as our glimpse of Jesus as beauty embodied in works did for us. In the sight of beauty and in the joy of our faith in Jesus' resurrection as expressed in our deeds, we give others the glimpse of beauty that sets them free to say "Yes" to God's call to faith and to charity. This is something our God would do every day in and with us. It is what happens when we do beautiful things for God. Do not be afraid. Walk in faith and show forth the beauty that sets people free for faith.

The Saving Grace Given Us in Memories

A reflection developed from texts by the Daughters of St. Paul

At the Easter Vigil we listened to the chanting of the “Exultet”—a beautiful poem announcing Jesus’ resurrection. It proclaims the end of a long night for fallen humanity and the beginning of a freedom that previously wasn’t imaginable. The first three words of the Exultet invite all of heaven and earth to join in singing for joy. We are filled with gratitude and want to share it with the entirety of creation.

The transition from darkness to light is a wonderful part of our Easter celebrations. Holy Week felt so intense, as we heard again and again the story of Jesus’ passion. It was a story filled with darkness but we know that it is not over even yet. With the lighting of a new fire and of the Easter candle we seem to pass from coldness to warmth and to a sense of anticipation. My own life can be very like this. We sometimes live our own versions of Lent when everywhere there are difficulties and challenges. Pain too can be a part of life. It can seem that the very worst has happened. That is perhaps what the apostles and all Jesus’ disciples would have felt. Things are supposed to work out like this! We need Easter to reassure us that darkness will give way to light.

Carrying our own small candle, lit from the great Easter Candle, gives us a taste of the love and mercy of God. It casts out darkness. It is the hope that sustains our lives.

Lord, we do continue to celebrate your resurrection. We even do it with enthusiasm and joy. We return to our ordinary routine and we need the flame of the Easter fire and candle in our hearts. That helps us lift up our voices in prayer and work to let the fire of love, hidden in our hearts, reveal itself in our deeds. Lord Jesus, as we celebrate your resurrection, renew your hope within our hearts. Fill us with strength to carry your mercy to others even amid difficulties. Grant that your resurrection enable me to see the events of life with new eyes and with hope in your promise of a new life. Keep my heart awake in selfless concern for others, in simplicity and in thankfulness for your free gifts of joy and dedication. Jesus, remind us always of who we are as bearers of your risen life and its newness. Deep within me I am aware of a new thirst for you, for loving as you love. I am aware of a kind of trembling hope that at last what I have found in you might transform my life and make it like yours. I know I am loved and that all you ask of me is to live that love. Help me to jump into your arms and trust in your love, especially when I feel weak or lost. Let your love be the flame in my life day by day and for a lifetime.

Paying Attention to Insignificant Things

A reflection taken from a Jerusalem Catechesis

When you were baptized into Christ, when you clothed yourself in him, you were transformed into Christ's likeness. We had been destined to become God's own children by adoption, and so God gave us a certain likeness to Christ—both in Christ's cross and in Christ's glory. We were called to live in communion with Christ so that you could rightly be called "Christ's", which is what "Christian" means. You were made God's anointed one in the likeness of Christ.

Everything takes place in a Christian's life in terms of images of spiritual realities. Christ bathed in the Jordan river, in order to lead us to turn wholly to God in living and in serving. But in bathing in that river Christ gave to its waters a kind of fragrance of his divinity, as he gives to all in baptism. When Christ came up from the water the Holy Spirit descended upon him, resting upon him permanently. God has done the same for us after we came from the baptismal water. We speak of the Holy Spirit as "anointing" Jesus for his mission and ministry and so we are anointed with oil as an image of the interior anointing with the Spirit which cannot be seen. So the holy chrism with which one is anointed symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Isaiah had said: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Spirit has anointed me. I was sent to preach good news to the poor.*" That is also why we have been anointed with same Spirit as Isaiah and Jesus.

Jesus was anointed because the Heavenly Father had destined him to be Savior of the entire world. This is why Jesus was anointed with God's Holy Spirit. But it was for a new work that he was anointed, and one which we continue. It is to help all peoples find God and choose to follow God wherever God may lead them. As David said, "Your throne, O God, shall endure forever and your royal scepter is a scepter of justice; You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity and so you have been anointed with the oil of gladness...". This is a spiritual oil and, in fact, it is the Holy Spirit—to whom Scripture refers as "the oil of gladness".

This declares a spiritual truth in a physical image. The truth is that we are all anointed with a spiritual joy; the Spirit, you see, is the source of spiritual joy. Beware of thinking of this as you do ordinary oil. Just as the Eucharistic bread, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is no longer ordinary bread but the Body of Christ, so the oil after the invocation is no longer ordinary oil but Christ's gift by which the presence of his divinity in us becomes the instrument through which you know spiritual joy.

It is this joy which is given us so it will permeate and transform all that we do into a work of the Risen Christ. We are to do everything in the joy of Christ's Resurrection, the joy of Christ's Spirit poured out, as he has told us, upon us for the salvation of the world's peoples. How can our daily tasks bring life to others? They can because they are instruments of the Life Giving Spirit. Know that you have been made instruments of the Spirit and of the Spirit's life and joy. Think of all you do as an opportunity to share this joy.

The Challenge Posed by Newness of Life

A reflection developed from a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

The Acts of the Apostles pictures the life of the apostles and of the members of the first Christian community of Jerusalem. The life, and the resurrection, of Jesus had changed things for both the apostles and for the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was not just that some of the Sanhedrin's members became Christians but that the newness of life which comes with resurrection upset everyone's understanding of life, and many of their expectations about what they could hope for. We easily accept this in the case of the Sanhedrin and its members but it may be strange to us to apply it to the apostles. The fact is that everyone's expectations had been turned upside down by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The members of the Sanhedrin had expected Jesus' death to leave them in control, as they had been previously. The apostles had expected Jesus' death would mean that God's Kingdom would come outwardly and so catapult them into positions of supreme prestige and power. What actually happened upset everyone. Some adjusted better than others. To appreciate the challenge ask yourself what difference Jesus' rising from death and entering into "resurrection" life is supposed to make for you, and then look honestly at how you have allowed it to change your way of doing things, or haven't.

We glimpse the dilemma of the Sanhedrin's members when we consider the effects of the healing of a cripple. They just couldn't admit that it had been done "in Jesus' name", because he was not at God's right hand—God's "right hand" person we would say. They would have to accept Jesus' teaching if they accepted that. But that would change everything! The apostles, on the other hand, had to accept that there were no thrones in their immediate future but that they faced a lifetime of preaching Jesus and the salvation he offered, everywhere and to everyone. The idea of having to do this among the "gentiles" particularly upset some of them.

Both groups saw clearly that they were being pushed to accept Jesus, either out of blind but overwhelming love or forcefully and out of divine mystery as revealed to them. They would have to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, the very offspring of God and equal to God. That would put all previous knowledge into a new context and require a very new understanding. All gradually realized that faith in Jesus and love for Jesus would draw them into ways and byways they never knew existed. The demands made on them seemed impossible. And they had lost control. Only God was in control and he was not doing as anyone had expected.

What kind of light are we willing to let love for Jesus cast on our plans for the future? What changes in our "knowledge" are we prepared to accept? Are we willing to let go of all efforts to "be in control"—of our lives, our understanding of Scripture, of our grasp of theology, of the way our community's religious life is organized? If Jesus has risen then there is a new center for our existence, and everyone's. It will transform us and our lives, and everything, unless we refuse to believe. Our strength and our courage are in the Lord. That is the answer of faith and it works itself out in all we do every day.