

THE OCTAVE OF OUR EASTER CELEBRATION

- Sun. **EASTER SUNDAY**
- April 1 **LIVING IN HOPE AND IN A NEW REALITY**
A reflection by Basil of Seleucia in an Easter homily
- Mon. **Monday of the Octave of Easter**
2 **RENEWING & DEEPENING OUR HOPE**
A reflection from The Paschal Mystery by Fr. Louis Bouyer
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3 **FEEDING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE**
A reflection attributed to Epiphanius
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4 **THE DIVINE LIFE OF SHARING**
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5 **WHY HAS CHRIST NOT YET COME TO SOME?**
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A reflection taken from an Easter homily by St. Bernard

LIVING IN HOPE & IN A NEW REALITY

A reflection from an Easter homily by Basil of Seleucia

Christ descended into hell to liberate all who were held captive there. In one instant he destroyed the record of our sin's debt, incurred under the law. Now it is erased and we are placed on the path to Heaven. There death no longer exists. There only eternal life and righteousness are found.

Those who have been newly baptized have received, in sign and in reality, a share in the blessings whose fullness is found only in Heaven. You and I share in these blessings too. Our initiation into the life of grace was and remains a pledge of our resurrection to Heavenly Life. Our baptism was and is the promise of Heaven's life. Our immersion imitated the burial of the Lord and our coming out of the water made us aware of our real hope, the reality of the resurrection.

Don't let yourself become blinded by the signs and appearances but believe in the reality to which they point. Accept the assurance of Paul: "If we have been united to Christ in a death like his, we will be united to him also in a resurrection like his." Baptism was the planting of a seed. Its fruit is immortal life.

The seed's planting was accomplished in the baptismal font but its fruit matures only in Heaven. The grace of the Spirit works in a mysterious way in the font, but this outward appearance mustn't be allowed to obscure the wonderful reality that has been accomplished. Water served as instrument but it is grace that gave re-birth. Grace transforms all who come to the font, just as human seeds are transformed in the womb. What went into the water as a kind of base metal is recast there as in a furnace so that the reality of immortality is revealed. This is sealed and made sure by the pledge of resurrection: the hope by which we now live.

These wonderful mysteries are symbolized by the white garment the newly baptized wear. The garments are an outward sign of blessings that are fully real. The radiant brightness of white symbolizes incorruptibility; the white band encircling the head proclaims liberty. We hold in our hand, as it were, the sign of our victory over the devil.

Christ is showing us that we have begun to rise from the dead. He does this now in symbol but soon enough it will be revealed in its full reality. We need only keep the garment that is faith undefiled and not let sin extinguish the lamp of grace. We need only preserve the crown which is the Spirit of the Lord who has come to rest upon us and dwell within us. Christ calls to us from Heaven in a voice of tremendous majesty, one that is full of loving tenderness:

"Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the Kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world!" In Christ we hope. In Christ we enter into a new life! In Christ we bear the fruit of love in all we say and do. To Christ be glory and power for ever, through endless ages! Amen!

RENEWING AND DEEPENING OUR HOPE

A reflection from The Paschal Mystery by Fr. Louis Boyer

The Church has long celebrated vigils in order to deepen and strengthen the hope Christians live by. In some places they were celebrated every Sunday. They give expression to an attitude of holy waiting which is characteristic of the Church as God's People. The Holy Spirit has been given us as pledge of the Bridegroom's coming and these symbols show what that coming will make actual in a glory that will last forever.

Early Christians often began their vigils proclaiming "The Lord is night!" It was an expression of their hope that the Lord would come with the first rays of morning. They recognized the one for whom they hoped was really in the Bread they received at the end of the vigil. In a sacramental sign, grace revealed the substance of God's gifts even if they would only be fully revealed in the light of glory. It was as though the Spirit were whispering in their ears, "Come to the Father". As pilgrims they returned to living daily as Christ, and with renewed enthusiasm.

This hope is a kind of viaticum which helps Christian believers wait patiently and actively for the call to enter their fatherland. Hadn't Jesus eaten with them? Hadn't he come to them and invited them to take him with them to their homes and work? They had received a foretaste of the supper to which they will be welcomed when they enter their eternal home.

This is an attitude the Church and all its members need to foster in every age. It is a firm hope in the future, knowing that its fulfillment is put off but is still very near. It is always imminent. It has been received as a pledge and promise and this hope is sustained by anticipations of it in sacramental signs and symbols.

Now it is our task, as members of Christ's Body, the Church, to help one another sustain the hope that all these promises will be fulfilled. Our life is to be a perpetual vigil and we have to invite those we know to share in this vigil. We live in a tradition uninterrupted since it was begun by the Christians of Jerusalem after the Lord's resurrection. They were responding to the call of Christ himself, as echoing the voices of Israel's prophets. If we wish to remain vitally alive in Christ and respond to that call we must continually relive all that is symbolized in the Great Paschal Triduum and the Easter Vigil. These present our entire life in anticipation. It is a life that is both promised and possessed. The possession is shown to the world by our lives and in the unquenchable hope that inspires and in-spirits us day by day.

FEEDING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

A reflection from a homily attributed to Epiphanius

“This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” We sometimes think of this joyful proclamation as most proper to Easter, but it is actually something we can and should repeat everyday of our lives. It declares the spiritual gladness which is God’s gift and which makes us pleasing to God when we live from it. Easter is our greatest feast, and it is a feast of renewal and salvation meant to transform every day of our lives.

In the Easter mystery God has fulfilled all symbols and prophecies. Christ is our Passover and he is sacrificed so that all things are made new. There is a new creation and we are that new creation, all of us together. We have new faith; we have new laws; we are a new People of God; we are a new Israel; we are a new and spiritual circumcision and a new and unbloody sacrifice; we are a new and divine covenant!

All of these facts remind us to let ourselves be constantly renewed. We are to renew a right spirit within our hearts and so prepare to enter into the mysteries of a new and perfect festival consisting of exultation in the heavenly gifts given us. We are now initiates of the mysteries of the New Passover.

Of old, Moses the lawgiver, was sent by God to save a people and give them a law. The Lord, the supreme lawgiver, has been sent to us, God by God. Christ has been sent and has been delivered from the devil and all evil spirits. He has made peace between all peoples by calling all to become one People of God. Christ has united us with God and with one another and with all the world.

Israel kept its Passover by night. We have entered into that celebration but have brought it into the light of full day though we keep it in the evening of this present world. The hearts of the faithful are sprinkled with the blood of Christ so they will become, as it were, new doorposts of the new House of God, the Body of Christ. We have been saved by the Red Sea that is baptism and are guided by the fire of the Spirit who has truly descended upon the waters to sanctify all.

God sent Moses to an ordinary rock from which came water to preserve the life of Israel. We turn to the Rock that is Christ and from him flows truly living and life-giving water. In a sense, the tablets of the law have been broken in pieces so that a new law might be given, a law of love which shall endure forever. We don’t make an image of a bull to offer sacrifice but offer to God the sacrifice of an unspotted Lamb which God has provided for the salvation of all. We aren’t give quail to eat but have the Dove that is the Holy Spirit descend upon us through our unity with Christ. We eat not manna but the Bread of Life. See how all symbols are fulfilled for us! Now we have only to live the realities that we have begun to experience. Let us help one another! God’s life is love and love never ceases to share; so our lives are to become a sharing with God and one another. It begins now but lasts forever. This is how one “eats” the Bread of Life!

THE DIVINE LIFE OF SHARING

A reflection from The Resurrection by Fr. Jean Danielou

The fact that Christ is Risen means that our humanity is now elevated to what had seemed an inaccessible realm of Divinity. The resurrection is the Good News in its most wonderful form. It is our glorious destiny and a reality that is far above our nature's capacities to attain. The Heavenly Father's love has called and gifted our race, and each of us individually, and done it through the gift of his only Son and the Holy Spirit. It is unprecedented! We creatures of flesh and blood, so close to the animal world, are plunged alive into the consuming fire of God's triune life. Everything mortal in us is destroyed and we are made incorruptible. What is mortal has been swallowed up by life!

All this is possible only through the action of God. In Christ God comes to us, takes our mortal nature and raises it above itself so that it may be with God where Christ is seated, at God's right hand. The first fruits of Christ's resurrection are our resurrections. With Christ we are already taken into the abyss of the Godhead. The Letter to the Hebrews compares Christ to an anchor that has been cast upwards into the heights of heaven. That is the guarantee that our hope is sure because in Christ it has already been fulfilled.

There is now a kind of "gravity of glory" drawing us upwards. It comes from the glorified human nature of Christ drawing all that is one with it upwards to where Christ is. "*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself*"; that is what Christ himself says. It is his promise.

Christ is the first born from the dead. He broke through the walls and shattered the fetters that kept us trapped in a prison-like existence. It is in this way that our destiny has been enlarged and opened up so that it is part of the infinite breadth and depths of Divine Life.

The power of Christ's resurrection transforms our entire being. One day it will even transform what were our dead bodies and raise them to new life. Yet even now we experience the power of that resurrection. When we were dead through sin, for example, we lacked the life of the Spirit which shares all that the Father and Son are; then God touched us through Christ and gave us this Spirit. This transforms our minds and hearts and fills them with a new kind of life. We are empowered not only to know and love the things of God but to share them.

The life of God is sharing. We begin to live that life as we share all that God has given us by nature and by grace. Only one of the realities that we are to share is knowledge. More important is the faith that discloses what such knowledge means for our everyday life. But what is most important is that we share sharing itself, and let it become a shared life. That is what it means to share Divine Life. Can there be anything more wonderous than this?

WHY HAS CHRIST NOT YET COME TO SOME?

A reflection from an Easter sermon by St. Bernard

All of us have been told that the Savior is medicine for our healing. But not all of us have taken this medicine. The result is that the Savior seems not to have come to some individuals. Isn't the medicine that is Christ effectual for all? Consider the following.

Christ has shown us humility in its perfection. But in some humility is not active. In that case it is as though this medicine did not exist for them. Though the Eternal Son was in the form of God he didn't regard equality with God as something to be hung on to but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant. How is such humility active in a proud person? What traces of humility can be found in individuals who go on being dazzled by the desire for ordinary wealth and honors? If you find this bedazzlement in your mind or heart doesn't it seem that for you Christ has yet to become incarnate? He isn't yet born in you.

Christ suffered great hardships and many pains. But if you avoid hardship and fear pain and even death, Christ has not conquered or endured hardships or pains in you. It is for you as though Christ had not died. You haven't yet become one with Christ in the truth he lived.

Some experience a death all day long in the form of anxiety. They fret over their work and over how hard it is to do penitence and deprive oneself of this or that. For them it is as though Christ had not yet risen. They haven't yet opened themselves to receive spiritual consolation. Who could bear so empty a life?

Aren't there many who remain earthly and don't know by personal experience that Christ has risen and ascended to a new kind of life? They often have spiritual consolations but they think these are all there is. So, they want to spend their entire day in devotions. They weep while at prayer and find that sweet. They sigh during their meditations and think this makes everything joyful and festive. They want the day to pass in a continual song of Hallelujah. But milk must be taken away from one who hasn't yet learned to eat solid food, as a spiritual adult. What will such a one do when consolations are withdrawn? When this need to grow beyond consolation is understood, they think they are being deserted by the Lord. For them the Holy Spirit has not yet come. They have to wait a little while until the Lord sees the time has come to clothe them with the power from on high that is the Spirit.

When the Spirit comes we experience what happened to the Apostles. They were moved to a more excellent way of love. They saw what a great victory over our common enemy and merely earthly goods was to be one, and how they were sent to help others. Isn't all this a description of how are we to celebrate Easter? But taking daily that medicine which is Christ who has born for us, suffered for all and died, who is risen, and who has ascended to the Heavenly Father, and sends the Spirit upon those who have accompanied him in all these things we enter into the fullness that is love for God and one another.

HOW TO BUY AT NO COST WHAT IS BEYOND PRICE

A reflection from an Easter homily by St. Bernard

Christ dwells in our hearts through faith. It can reasonably be supposed that as long as faith lives in us so does Christ. The life of faith is love; faith works through love. When we see people who are active in good works and cheerful in the fervor of their way of life, there is no doubt that faith lives in them. Now one of the chief works of faith is putting to death in themselves, and in others, the works of the flesh. If we fail to do this faith dies within us. So, what are we to do if we find still in us a love of things of the flesh?

We must go with the women who went early to the tomb of Jesus and buy spices. Above all, we must seek the spices that are affectionate compassion, zeal for uprightness, and the spirit of discretion.

Take note to learn first how to be compassionate of yourself and then of those whom you may need to reprove. Do both in a spirit of gentleness. An example is more persuasive and effective than any other reproof. But how can one who has not personally wept for personal sins be compassionate to another? A generous spirit is ashamed to sadden one who is already sufficiently troubled.

But what do we do for someone who is stiff-necked and abuses other's compassion in order to continue in wrong ways? We have to be compassionate toward righteousness itself and so give a reproof, but how? This is what zeal for righteousness has to learn. First, we have to learn that we can't make virtue spring up or vice depart. Second, we must implore God's grace. Grace is free and is freely given; it is bought for nothing. But to be an instrument of grace we need three other spices: We need sobriety in speech, generosity in encouraging others, and effectiveness in persuading. These have no price but are gifts.

Many are inspired by a sincere intention but speak wrongly; once a word flies out of your mouth you can't call it back. But those who lack words can get lost in impatience as those who have words can lack prudence in what they say. So, begin by confession your own sinfulness. Where there is such confession there is beauty before the Lord. The best word is the example of your deeds. Be merciful, be respectful, be patient and show love for godliness.

First seek perfect continence with regard to sin and self-seeking. You owe this to yourself; only then can you show it to another. To this add mercy. We are saved along with others and so must be patient with them, and so need true patience with ourselves. Remember that it is through many tribulations that we enter into the Kingdom of God. The Lord gives to us a certain merriment and joy of heart that smiles out on others. Like an angel this can roll away the stone covering the entrance to a dead heart. Only the Lord can give us access to another's heart. He rolls away the stones of obstinacy and raises up faith instead. The Lord alone can cause such things; but he bids us say to one another with this joy: Come! See the place where the Lord was laid! See that He is risen and bids us all rise to a new life and its joy.

WHAT CHRIST SHOWED US ON THE CROSS

A reflection taken from an Easter homily by St. Bernard

Is there anyone here who would look upon the symbol of Christ hanging on the cross and taunt him? But if you don't trust him to give you the life you long for aren't you calling out: *Come down from that cross and then I will believe and follow you!* Don't we do this when we turn from God's way to sin and worldly ways of making our lives seem better? You were hoping he would redeem you but nothing happened!

You don't experience the fact that Christ has come down from the cross. But he did it by entering a tomb and then rising from death to life. Are you willing to follow this example? Do you believe that this is the way to life in abundance? If you are want to, then don't fail to see and learn the four great excellences which Christ shows us on the cross. They are the love which is charity, the obedience to our God who brings us to our cross, the humility which accepts even death as a door to life, and the patience with never gives up believing in God's promises to Christ even as we hang on our cross.

Charity was made perfect in Christ because he laid down his life to make us his friends. Christ's obedience to the Heavenly Father was complete because he did what the Father asked of him even to dying on a cross. He bore insults and all sorts of mistreatment as though he were no one special because in humility he didn't cling to being treated as God. Who could be more patient than one who didn't even try to obtain from the Heavenly Father anything for which the hour had not yet come. He didn't try to determine the hour but left it in the Father's hands.

Whoever we are, then, we follow our Head, and especially on that day on which all are symbolically redeemed and re-formed in Christ's image and likeness. We do not cease taking up our cross. We do not cease doing penance. We never give up but persevere in hope until the Spirit tells us it is time to put aside our labors. Yet the Triduum in its trinitarian character symbolizes the labor, the rest and the resurrection that go on daily in us.

Let us all rejoice and clothe ourselves in praise. Lord, who is like you? Who is like the Lion of Judah or the root of David? Christ is the root because it is from Christ that all support comes. He alone, as the Book of Revelation tells us, is worthy to open the scroll in which God's Plan of Salvation is presented. He fulfilled that plan and so makes it know to all who come to Him and believe in Him. Let grief be far removed and let all sadness be blown away like so much dust. If you have risen with Christ, then seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

If you do these things then you too may rejoice to pass from the consolations of this world, through compunction and humility, to enter the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father. The One who is our God calls us. Let us go to him with joy every day of our lives.