

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

&

THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

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OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO THE SPIRIT

From an Easter Homily by Gueric of Igny

In the first book of the Bible we hear: *“They told Jacob, Joseph is still alive! When he heard this his spirit revived and he said: It is enough, I will go and see him!”* Do you think: What’s the point of this? What does this have to do with Christ’s resurrection? Our hearts are burning within us for Jesus; it is Jesus we hunger for, not Joseph! But these words about Joseph seem to me equivalent to the words we hear in the Gospel about Jesus. Mary Magdalen met Jesus as she wept at his tomb, and she went and told all the disciples, but they didn’t believe her! Jesus walked the road to Emmaus with two disciples, but when they went and told the others, they wouldn’t believe. They were trapped in their mourning and despair, like Jacob had been when he thought Joseph was dead. When he heard he was alive everything changed! Has that happened to you, now that you have heard that Jesus is alive? Or isn’t anything really changed for you?

It is the Spirit who bears witness in our hearts and transforms them. It is much more important to receive Jesus in our hearts than to see him with our eyes or hear him with our ears. The Spirit makes the deepest of impressions. What room is left for doubt when the Spirit witnesses to us? If we have received the Spirit there must be a complete understanding, so that everything fits together for us. We must go where Jesus told us we will meet him.

We must adore him so that afterwards we may never taste death! For everyone who believes in the Son has everlasting life! How does the witness to Christ’s love change you? Jesus is alive! Has your spirit come to life? You were weary, languishing, even asleep and lukewarm from the ordinariness of life. Are you renewed and revived? That is what shows your lives have been renewed. Is it enough that Jesus is alive? If Jesus lives, I live. My spirit acts through Jesus’ Spirit. Yes, he is my life, my all, for I can’t lack anything if Jesus is alive! Everything else can be taken from me, for nothing else matters so long as He lives! Let him take no account of me; even then it is enough for me that He lives! When the love of Christ so absorbs a person’s affections that, unmindful and forgetful of self one has no feeling for anything but Jesus and what pertains to him, then life is no burden and life’s difficulties bring no real pain.

“Blessed are they who hunger, for they shall be satisfied!” When we hear someone talking about a marvelous party and inviting us to it, what we hear makes us the more anxious and eager for it. If we hear about Jesus and know he calls us, doesn’t that fill us with joy and eagerness? What if we have been humbled even into the dust? What if we have been cast down by penance and mourning and life’s sorrows? Now a party is coming that will never end and only get better and better! So why do you stay stuck in your former attitudes and preoccupations? Jesus is alive! Go to him! This news is like an egg or a nut. You have to open it and eat to taste sweetness and joy! What are you waiting for? The Spirit fills you with joyful love. When will you share it? That is how we show Jesus is alive in our hearts! Love one another as Jesus loves us. Love all who still need to come alive and to live Jesus’ new life.

WE ARE VICTORS IN CHRIST

A reflection taken from an Easter sermon by St. Bernard

All those who are born of God overcome the world. That is well said and it is a good description of what Christ's victory over sin and death brings us. For example, a victory over temptation is a sign of one's heavenly birth. The one who is God's natural son triumphed over the world and its ruler and so over sin and death. We do too, because we are adopted children of God, are victors in the same way. We overcome the world by our faith. *"The righteous live by faith"*.

The thing to remember is that one who resists temptation and overcomes wickedness doesn't do it by personal strength. We don't glory in ourselves but in Jesus. John tells us: *"The one who overcomes the world is the one who believes that Jesus is God's Son."* The Heavenly Father himself testified *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*, and the Scripture continues, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"*. Do you doubt because many who believe in Jesus are still entangled in the world and its passions? Recall how many there are who aren't afraid of threats or attracted by promises, but one who doesn't obey God's commands or follow God's counsels or seek his promises doesn't treat Jesus as Son of God. If that is faith it is without works, and it is dead.

What is a living and victorious faith? It is a faith through which Christ dwells in our hearts. The Church, and we ourselves, are born of Christ through water and through blood, as they flow from Christ's side on the cross, but we are also born of the Spirit. *"There are three which testify on earth, the Spirit, the water and the blood"*. Take the water as baptism, the blood as martyrdom and the Spirit as love. The life of faith is love. God's love pours the Spirit into our hearts that we may love as Christ does. Now remember that martyrdom and baptism happen in us every day. There is a martyrdom of daily sufferings and there is a baptism of daily compunction and tears. Even the very weak can and do undergo this baptism and martyrdom.

But to understand how we become victors in these ways listen again to John: *"All that is in the world is desire of the flesh, desire of the eyes and worldly ambition"*. We need a three-fold defense against this three-fold temptation. The baptism and the blood, as we have just explained them, show how two are rejected. The third, that triumphs over all, is love. We must not give ourselves over to spiritual vanity but ask for the gift of burning with love. If these things are joined in you there is a believable witness that God dwells in you.

Can the Heavenly Father refuse to testify you are his child if the Son so testifies? And the Spirit won't fail to agree with the Father and the Son. Those are truly united to God whom the Father receives as children and heirs, whom the Son receives as brothers and sisters and fellow-heirs, and the Holy Spirit makes them one with himself. The Spirit is the indestructible bond of love in whom the unity of the Godhead is realized and in whom our unity with God is also realized. Rejoice in the Rising of Christ for He raises us up with him and we experience this daily in our victory, not only over temptation but in showing love to one another just as Christ has shown love to us.

DOING GOD'S WORK WITH CHRIST

A reflection taken from an Easter homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Christ, the true Son of the Heavenly Father, tells us that a son does only what he sees the Father doing. On the cross he cried out "*It is finished!*" He had done the entire work which the Father had given him to do. What is this work, so special, so singular, so wonderful? Scripture first calls our attention to mercy. Indeed, Jesus did many *works*. There is the entire world as a work of wisdom. There is the work of judgment, which is a work of mercy, and in this work appears his greatest work, love. In mercy he shows us goodness, charity and kindness.

Christ's work is in harmony with his name. We know his name means salvation. This is what savors of wisdom and mercy and charity. 'Jesus' means my Savior, my well-being, and my mercy. How could he accomplish this work except by saving the wretched? We were wretched because we had made ourselves so unlike God. We were hungry, we were weary, we were dying. His mercy brought us spiritual refreshment, spiritual repletion, spiritual drunkenness. He took upon himself all that was contrary, and by this he brought about their opposites—e.g., he brought life through death. He accepted into himself the leaven of our mortality and then he purified himself of this leaven by his passion and resurrection. He became our pure, unleavened bread.

We are celebrating the feast of this unleavened bread. Our bread is the body of the Lord. To eat it we too must be free of leaven. That means we must cast away sin. Yet how are we to purge ourselves of it? The Lord teaches us. We do it in the same way He did. We must accept insults, belittling, even physical violence; i.e., we accept the cross. Is there any other way to resurrection?

But there are two resurrections. The first is a spiritual resurrection. We need to arrive at this resurrection by means of the hardships of life. The second is a bodily resurrection. We need the first to receive the second. Yet we are negligent. We contaminate ourselves after being purified by doing this. We have to flee to Christ's blood. That means we have to imitate Christ's passion by our way of life. It is by doing this that we are made able to share his bodily resurrection, but only after we have died with Him.

Of course, we aren't able to do this by our own efforts. We accomplish everything by his mercy. That is how his gift of mercy leads us to charity and charity to the cross and the cross is found in our service to those who struggle along with us and need our help to receive wisdom and the love which enables one to live by wisdom. The highest wisdom is that of the cross and the cross finds its completion in mutual love. Let us, then, love one another by helping one another, not only in a bodily but a spiritual way. When we do this, it is Christ who acts within us and in us shows mercy and love to all who are in need in any way. That is how we begin to rise with Christ.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Taken from The Sun at Midnight by Fr. Bernardo Olivera, OCSO

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed: *“Not what I want but what you want!”* and on Calvary he cried out *“You are my God!”* Nothing could be truer. God, his Father, frees him from death through resurrection. How can we describe Jesus' experience at the moment of his resurrection?

First, by suffering such abandonment and entrusting himself to the Father Jesus embraced an adventure that could only end well. *“Yes!”* rang gloriously in his ears, silencing the *“No!”* of creatures. That is why his Beatitudes are true. Second, his mortal body was transformed into a spiritual one, a lifegiving spirit. He saw himself created anew, a New Adam, the firstborn of those to rise from the dead. He received the Name above all names and experienced the perfection of his incarnation because the whole fullness of deity began to dwell bodily in him. Third, he multiplied his saving presence and became identified with the little ones and the persecuted. There can be no doubt that the resurrection is for Jesus a deeply God-filled experience and one of God's transforming action.

That is the key to understanding the Evangelists' silence about how resurrection took place. To encounter the Ineffable One is an ineffable reality. The different experiences of the Risen Jesus are human attempts to communicate the incommunicable. Salvation history, like the covenant with its mediators and prophets, converges on Jesus Christ. In Him humanity and God are united in a nuptial embrace. Messianic times—celebrating this marriage—begin with the arrival of Jesus, the Bridegroom. This is precisely why John the Baptist is called *“friend of the bridegroom”*. The fact that Jesus experienced this reality in this way explains why he presented his message about God's Kingdom in terms of a wedding feast. *“I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it with you in my Father's Kingdom”*. In the Book of Revelation, we find a fuller development of the nuptial relation between Christ and his Church. In it we find the eschatological experience of the Risen Christ in his relationship with us. Jesus experiences himself as the Bridegroom of the Church and the Spouse of every Christian.

We are told that Christ is present among us with solicitous spousal love as one who nourishes and tenderly cares for us. He has a *“divine zeal”* for our salvation. He does everything possible to present us as without spot or wrinkle, holy before him in love. In speaking to the Churches in Revelation he laments and complains about the little love shown him by his bride, just as the Lord did in speaking to ancient Israel. Yet the final word isn't a threat but is filled with the zeal of passionate love. *“Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking. Open the door and I will come in and eat with you!”* He is aflame with desire to celebrate the eternal wedding feast with us. It is the model of all mystical experience. To live in Christ, to die and rise again with him is our experience and reaches its climax in the next world. It has already begun. We cry, *“Come!”* and he responds, *“Certainly, I am coming soon!”* Our experience of Easter and resurrection is one of contemplation.

CHRIST'S QUESTION TO US AT THE TOMB

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

In St. John's Gospel we find Jesus speaking to a woman at the tomb. He asks, "*Who are you looking for?*" It is a question Jesus asked his first two followers. He returns to the same words at the Gospel's end. The woman was looking for someone who would dry her tears and faithfully love her and save her. Do you realize who you are looking for? Is it your God? This is part of our Easter. It asks us to open the tomb of our heart and let in the power of the living Lord. If we hear that question and challenge ourselves to respond to it then we will hear Jesus call our name, just as he called Mary by her name. Mary recognizes Jesus only after he calls her name.

Calling Mary's name reawakened her inner being and regenerated her freedom. It renewed in her the creative potential by which God calls every person into existence and entrusts them with a special mission. O Risen Lord Jesus, why are we weeping? What are our deepest sufferings? It is only through you, Lord, that I can reach into the depths of my heart and see what we're looking for. If we pray in this way Jesus will help us find the objective of our endless searching. He will show us it is a person we seek. We are seeking Jesus, the one who died and rose for us.

Jesus is ready to help us roll away the tomb which seals our lives, opening the way to life with Him. The power of the resurrection reaches into every place and time. We are called to prepare ourselves with a new mind and heart to grasp his power. What pain and sadness do you have and how do they lead you to reject Jesus' word of comfort—perhaps because we have no idea of exactly what liberation Jesus' resurrection brings us.

Do you cultivate the fantastic and illusory idea that everything can and must change in the blink of an eye? Exactly what does Christ's Paschal victory mean for you? That is where we have to begin. The first certainty is that Christ's victory happens first in us. We are the first work of the resurrection and the revelation of Christ's victory. Each of us is loved, pardoned, renewed and sent. We witness to others Christ's living presence, that of the Living Christ. We know that is our mission to others as well.

The Risen Jesus didn't obliterate our past, any more than he did Israel's. He resurrects it in himself, uniting in himself both yesterday and today and tomorrow. He unites memory with hope and with tradition and with freedom. Within us, if we look carefully, there are deep affections for parents and friends and family, recognition of what we have been given, awe and wonder at the mysteries of life, and much more. Our freedom has to use our past to set its course. It is both creativity and faithfulness. God is one of those who have come to us and loved us and accepted us and even died for us. Our creative freedom involves a faithfulness to all this. This is part of who you seek and why you seek Jesus and God. He can embrace all things and people. So, he restores them to us in a way that renews us, and them. Is this what you seek? What more do you seek? Ask and you shall find! Knock and it shall be opened to you.

WHAT IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION?

A reflection from an Easter homily by Guerric of Igny

“Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection”. Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep and are first born from the dead. This resurrection is prototype of all others and guarantees the rising of our spirits and of our bodies. Even for the first resurrection Christ has prepared a two-fold grace. Through the living out of the paschal mystery in our daily lives we rise from the death of sin, and by the joyful celebration of this feast today we rouse ourselves from laziness and sleep and from half-heartedness to feel a thrill of joy and a sense of new life and vigor.

The very thought of the dead Jesus overwhelms me with grief and almost despair. It is in the living God that my heart and flesh rejoice. And now I recognized my living savior where before I mourned a dead man. I slept and I awoke, as Christ himself says. Awake my sleeping soul and rise from the dead for Christ gives you light. As the new sun rises the grace of the resurrection already casts a radiance over the whole world. It is reflected in the eyes of those who have watched for him since daybreak and wait for the dawning of the day of eternity.

This is the day that knows no evening, the day whose sun will never set again. Once that sun went down but now, once and for all, it has ascended above the heavens, leading death itself captive. This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. And what about you? Do you watch daily at the threshold of wisdom’s house, fixing your eyes on the doorway and keeping vigil like Mary Magdalen? She kept vigil at the tomb and if you do you will find what she found. Jesus, like wisdom, hastens to make himself known to those who long for him. While it was still dark Mary came to watch at the tomb and she found Jesus!

He was standing there in the flesh! Perhaps you think that you can know him only in the Spirit. Yes, you can be sure of finding his spiritual presence. If he observes you persevering prayer, he will come to you in this way. So, say to the Lord what Mary did: ***“My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks for you”***. But you can also find him even in the flesh. Recall his own words: ***“Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters you did for me!”*** If your eyes are opened by faith you can see the Lord in these brothers and sisters! You can reach out to them and care for them and not let them go away unaided. How can you help them? You can help them to a more alive faith so they too see the face of Christ in one another—even in you.

If you will do this see if you don’t find yourself singing with Mary: ***“In the morning fill us with your love; we shall exult and rejoice all our days!”*** You have found love and the One you love above all. Share your joy and watch it multiply. You have begun to taste what the First Resurrection is.

SIGNS THAT OPEN EYES TO RESURRECTION

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

St. John's Gospel tells us Mary Magdalen was weeping near Jesus' tomb. She is crying, she bends over to look inside, two angels ask her why she is weeping, and then Jesus himself asks her that same question. Immediately we hear her answer: She is weeping because the Lord is dead and she fears that someone may have profaned his tomb. She thinks Jesus had been taken away and put she knows not where.

But there is a more profound answer to the question and Mary's crying. She has seen two signs of resurrection—the empty tomb and the angels. What she should have said was “I am crying because I haven't managed to understand the signs of resurrection”. My eyes are so filled with tears that I can't see the signs of life. So, she can't accept the words of consolation given her. She can imagine anything except death and she can't find a way out of that dead end.

We Christians may believe but only in words; we may profess the resurrection but be unable to see the signs that resurrection is only a past event. We can't see the Risen One in ourselves and in those around us. We are so preoccupied with suffering and desolation and disasters that we can't let ourselves be consoled and only imagine that death is everywhere—as though the Lord's dead body was the true reality! Why don't we find ourselves able to accept the transforming joy of resurrection?

Mary Magdalen is the image of too many Christians and, even more, she is the image of our fallen race. Consider the following words of Isaiah: “Come to the water, all you who are thirsty. Though you have no money, come! Buy grain without money and eat, and at no cost take wine and milk. Listen to Me and you will have good things!” But there is more. “With you I will make an everlasting covenant with all the favors promised to David...”. Something of universal importance is promised, and has happened!

More than hunger and thirst there is a universal desire for community, for deep and authentic relationships and for peace. There are more than physical things for which we all thirst—truth, peace, justice, community and love. God will have to, and has promised to satisfy these hungers. God answers our desires with his covenant. God will make an everlasting and wholly stable friendship with us and it will be a community with all the goods we long for.

The Church reads Isaiah's words as a promise of Christ's glorious resurrection. In the resurrection Jesus makes himself known in a new, unimagined way. The first has to do with warmth, intimacy and fecundity of life and the second with a spirit of sacrifice. But to see these things we have to free, or have freed, eyes and hearts that can see only evil and absence and loss. How does God make this believable? God calls a Church into being. We, who are the Church, have to make resurrection, and all that comes with it, believable. We have to do it by warmth, concern, care, love, telling the truth, and all the rest. Stop crying! Rejoice and begin to live resurrection life in your heart, so you can live it in your community and your home and everywhere.