

THE FIFTH WEEK IN EASTERTIDE

- Sun. **The Fifth Sunday in Easter Season**
May 19 **WHAT WE CELEBRATE EACH SUNDAY**
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20 **WHAT WE BRING TO GOD IN SACRIFICE**
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21 **THE FREEDOM WE RECEIVE IN CHRIST**
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23 **THE REST CHRIST BRINGS**
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24 **THE TWO ASPECTS OF OUR VOCATION**
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WHAT WE CELEBRATE EACH SUNDAY

Taken from On the Paschal Solemnity by Eusebius of Caesarea

Under the Law of Moses, the paschal lamb was sacrificed once a year. Under the Law of Christ, we celebrate the pasch at least once a week, and many celebrate it more often. We are continually being filled with the Body and Blood of the Savior. That means we continually prepare ourselves to leave behind all that does not express the love Christ has shown us and commanded us to imitate. We are always departing from whatever is Egypt for us and entering into the desert where we find only God and our Savior. God calls us to do this daily!

Doing this makes us God's people. That doesn't happen through ordinary circumcision, as it once did, but by letting the sharp edge of God's Word cut away all that is not born of Christ's love. We celebrate this with the unleavened bread that is sincerity and truth. Grace frees us from the old and re-creates us in the image of God as revealed in Jesus. We live under a new law and celebrate a new Passover.

While he was having his Last Supper with his disciples, the Lord said: "*With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you*". He longed for the new Passover and the New Covenant that was his gift to them with his New Commandment. When we partake of this sort of food, we, with Christ, are filled with a longing for the salvation of all. We want everyone to have life in its abundance, because that is what Christ longed for and why he did all that he did. Love of God is inseparable from love for one another.

If we truly partake of the food of Christ's charity our minds and hearts are cleansed of all evil and wickedness and filled with sincerity and truth. We smear the blood of the One Lamb on the doorway to our inner being and the new person we become in doing this is a putting on of Christ, as St. Paul says.

When we go into the "desert" we fast from all that bound us to the old life we lived according to the ways of this world as it has been shaped by sin and selfishness. We do this so we may partake of the Lord's Passover by receiving his body and blood, not only physically but spiritually. This means that our spirit and its love are transformed. We no longer love ourselves first and care for ourselves first. We love our God first and do all we do to praise and glorify and please God. How can we please God except by letting God's Kingdom come among us and within us?

This is not something we have to do in Jerusalem, nor is it something that we have to do only once a year and in some special ceremony. We do it day in and day out, as often as we remember the Lord's gift of self to the Heavenly Father and for us. We do it not only in our church but in the places where we work and sharing with those who labor at ordinary tasks with us. Our Lord Christ spent himself continually bringing healing and inner peace to people of every kind and circumstance. How could we be content to do less? This is how we put on Christ more and more completely.

WHAT WE BRING TO GOD IN SACRIFICE

Developed from St. Ambrose's Commentary on Psalm 119

We constantly pray the psalms. That means we have many times prayed: *“Lord, see how I have loved your precepts, and in your mercy give me life”*. We are like little children crying out, “Look at me!” We wouldn't want the Lord to look at us if we didn't think that it would give him joy. We want him to look into our hearts and see the fullness of his love there. That is what gives him pleasure. God is love and when he sees love in us he sees his own image.

Of course, it isn't just any love we have in our hearts. We have the love which Christ showed us in giving himself for us and for everyone. When we are like God we become love ourselves and in becoming love we have to show it by loving and caring for one another. The Law of Moses commanded that every Israelite should come into God's presence at least three times a year. But one who is filled with love for God comes to God daily and hourly. The Law of Moses also commanded that no one should come to the Lord with empty hands. What do we bring to the Lord? We bring love and the expression of love that is praise and joy. That is what we offer to God in sacrifice; we offer our joy in God's love and our praise for the salvation and healing it works in and for all.

David, in composing psalms, reminded us that because we are God's “our mouths are filled with rejoicing”. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We have all had the spirit poured into our hearts. What else is our love for God and one another? David offered himself daily to God in prayer. His offering wasn't an empty symbol but took the form of sharing his love for God's commands. *“I opened my mouth and sighed for your commandments”*. How did he do this? Not by parading good works before others but by serving God in ways that were secret and often went unnoticed. When the Heavenly Father sees what we have done in secret then He repays us. What is God's reward? Just the increase in our joy filled love.

“I have loved your precepts”, says David. He doesn't claim to have perfectly observed them, and we know that he sinned in various ways. But he loved the commandments because he saw that they were pathways leading to God and God's love. You can keep commandments out of fear but the true perfection of their keeping is charity. Anyone who proclaims the Gospel and does it out of love for God, as shown by one's way of life, is practicing charity.

Practical love is the expression of charity. Charity is generous, and how could one be more generous than in sharing God's love as shown us in Christ? It is impossible for us not to want to do what we love. What we long for more than all else is to be perfect in charity. If this is what we pray for we can be sure that God will hear us. Mercy will be granted us and we will be filled with abundant life. We need this mercy just as we need the gift of divine love. To pray for this always is to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. Humble yourself in every sort of humble and even hidden deed of love.

THE FREEDOM WE RECEIVE IN CHRIST

Developed from Baldwin of Canterbury's Twofold Resurrection

The Lord has shown us that resurrection is the fruit of loving obedience. Christ is resurrection and life personified and these are the first fruits he seeks to share with us. But why am I talking about a twofold resurrection when Christ rose only once? The reason is that we have to be raised from the death that is sin as well as the death that is of the body; but Christ had only to rise only from the body's death because he had already shown us how to entirely avoid sin. A single resurrection answered to a single death for Christ. But we have died twice.

Nevertheless, the resurrection of Christ is the exemplar and cause of both of our resurrections. We rise the first time by faith and by its sacramental expression in baptism. By faith we are re-created, justified, sanctified and raised from the death that is sin. This is our first resurrection. By it we die to sin and are raised to a new life. By it we live for and in holiness by walking in the newness of life which Christ has shown us.

Our first resurrection begins when we first show loving obedience to God. We do the opposite of what our first parents did when they loved themselves and disobeyed God. The lack of love led to the lack of obedience, and the lack of loving obedience embodied sin and led to death, both spiritually and physically. But in Christ and by his love we are freed! We are freed to love and obey our God with all our hearts.

This first resurrection has a special glory which St. Paul speaks about. "Far be it from me, he tells us, to glory in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". But this glorying in the cross brings us knowledge that "*our glory is in the hope of our adoption as God's children*". When to turn to God in love we begin to walk in the way of holiness that is shown us by God's commandments. We begin to love God with all our heart and mind and strength, and then we begin to love our neighbor not only as we love ourselves but as Christ has shown us love by loving us even unto death.

If we continue in obedient love until God calls us through death, then we enter into the second resurrection. That begins as our full adoption as God's children, our glorification with Christ and all the saints. This glory will be that of one who sees God in the glory of God's divinity. That glory is manifested in the body by its incorruptibility. Then it is that this perishable nature of ours puts on imperishability. In God's presence all will sing the praises of God together and forever. Our mouths will be filled with the sounds of rejoicing and with hymns of gladness. Our song will be love and our love will be for God and for one another and for the beauty of all creation. We must start now. Blessed be God forever! May our love proclaim this every day and forever.

OUR NEW HOPE RECREATES US

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

We are celebrating the reign of new life. We rejoice in the fact that the tyranny of fear and death has ended. We have experienced a new birth and have begun to live in a new way. Everything has been transformed for us and we know that at the last day absolutely everything will be transformed for the entire universe.

Now all this newness, as well as the beginning of the end of all that was shaped by death and the fear of death, is not due to anything we have done. As Scripture tells us, it is not brought about "*by the will of human beings or the desires of the flesh but by God*". But we have to struggle mightily to find ways to say all this so that its meaning becomes clear. Let's try a metaphor.

Suppose we say that faith is the womb in which we are newly conceived and that baptism is our birth into a new life. The Church is our nurse and her teachings are the milk we need to live and grow. The Bread from Heaven is our food and it brings us to maturity in the new life. It does it by the practice of love and virtue. In this new life we are married to true wisdom. What does this complex metaphor tell us? It explains what it means to say that we have been given a new hope and that when we live out of that hope we live the sort of life Christ lived on earth and by which we, and everyone, can be drawn to heaven.

"*This is the day the Lord has made*" and it is far different from the old life which the world gave us. The difference is made by our new hope. The world gave us a life which lead simply to death. This wasn't a hope but a dread and fear of this imprisoned us in desperate and futile attempts to escape death, or put it off as long as possible. But now all this is over. We have a new hope because our living has a new end and one that we don't dread the end of this life but look forward to with the greatest joy and anticipation.

If we return to our metaphor we would say that our heart is a new earth which drinks in the rain of grace that comes from heaven and, in us, yields a rich harvest. In this new creation purity of life is like a new sun that shows us all things in a new way. On this new earth created through faith and love of God the flock of the Lord finds abundant pasture and superabundant life. What can we say? "*Oh, the depths of the richness of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*" To have life in abundance we need only live a faith inspired love for God, for one another, and for all creation. That is the fruit born by the Tree of Life!

On this day, in this time when we celebrate resurrection, the true human person is re-created in the image and likeness of God. We, like God, are the guardians of all that live and seek only to live harmoniously together in a way that increases life because it increases mutual love. It is this which replaces the reign of death and brings a birth to a life that never ends. Jesus says to us: "*I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God!*" Could there be more wonderful news? He who took upon himself our humanity is drawing us up to our true Father after him. Let us begin to rejoice, knowing that our joy to will have no end. Now we know clearly what Christ's resurrection means.

THE REST CHRIST BRINGS

A reflection developed from *The Life In Christ* by Nicholas Cabasilas

The Christian's resting place is in Christ. He alone is goodness and truth and all that is lovable. That means that nothing in Christ prevents a person who rests in Him from loving with all the love that God placed in our spirits in the beginning. Nothing in Christ prevents such a person from rejoicing to the full extent of human capacity. What is more, one's capacity is increased by growth in virtue and Christian maturity as one lives out the gifts received in the water of rebirth.

We can't find full joy or love in our relations with the good things, as they are called, of this present life. All these things seem good, and, in some measure, they are; yet they are still only reflections of what is genuinely good and lovable. In Christ, however, we find a love and a joy that are wonderful beyond the power of words to describe. This is because God, in creating all things, ordained that love and joy should be directed first and last toward Himself. Why? It is because God is infinite good and has infinite joy, and wants to make us capable of entering into goods that are infinite, into himself, and so into joy that has no measure. That is why God made us, and all our feelings, for Himself. It is God's greatest gift.

Consider for a moment the greatness of God's love. If we would appreciate how wonderful it is to simply love God with the power to love that is God's gift; it overbalances and cancels every unpaid debt we can owe. If the divine judge regards love as balancing innumerable blessings who can doubt that it is surpassingly excellent and wonderful?

Now it is clear that the plenitude of love is fully matched by the plenitude of joy. Joy corresponds in every way to love. The fullness of the one follows from the fullness of the other. We know that human persons have a great and wonderful capacity for both love and joy, but that this joy is experienced most fully in the presence of the beloved.

The truly supreme beauty, the true beauty, is the Savior. He himself calls these feelings perfect when they are experienced in this way. When the Spirit comes to dwell within us it brings various fruits. The first of these to manifest themselves are love and joy. Scripture itself calls these the fruits of the Holy Spirit. That is because God is love and God is joy and the first thing that God does when He comes to dwell in us is to make us aware of these truths. God is the supreme good and anyone who is aware of the presence within of supreme good cannot fail to love that good and rejoice in it. Rejoice with all your heart and strength and share that joy with all those you encounter. This is our vocation and our joy.

THE TWO SIDES OF OUR VOCATION

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

The Church recognizes that there are two aspects to Christian living. They are both gifts of God and we are called to both. The first is the life of faith and the second is that of contemplation. The first is spent on pilgrimage in time and seems to be filled with toil. The second is known fully only in eternity and is enjoyed fully only in our eternal dwelling place and in its repose.

The first kind of life has always been symbolized by the apostle Peter and the second by the apostle John. The life of active love for neighbor is lived in this world and comes to perfection in the contemplation of the world to come. That second type of life will be imperfect until the end of the world and then will have no end or limit.

Peter, and all of us, are called to follow Christ. We are to imitate Christ in our tolerance for passing evils, and so find its perfection in patience. This perfection is following Christ perfectly and faithfully unto death. Here in the land of the dying we must endure the sufferings of the world and attain its perfection in bearing the cross with Christ.

John too was called to follow Christ in this way but he was also called to rest on the breast of Christ and share the knowledge of great mysteries. But John too is called to bear a cross and will attain the perfection of knowledge and its joys only after that. In the land of the living there will be fulfillment and one will experience all the good things of the Lord.

Christ says to Peter that his duty is to follow him, and he says to John that his duty is to wait until Christ comes to take him to himself. Yet we mustn't separate, even in our minds, these two apostles or what each symbolizes. Both of them live the life of active and loving concern for Christ's sheep and both of them were called to attain the life symbolized by John's rest on Christ's breast. Living by faith they both acted and waited, they both loved and suffered and they both longed for the coming of God's Kingdom and the joys without end of the life to come.

They were not alone in this. They were one with the entire Church, the bride of Christ. In time it too will be delivered from the trials it knows now and live forever in the peace of the world to come. For the sake of all the saints as they struggle amid the storms of this life Peter was given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, yet we must remember that the whole Church binds and loses from sin and the whole Church testifies to the true and life-giving teaching about God and salvation.

John too spoke of great mysteries concerning the Word that is with God and is God and about the divinity of Christ and about the trinity and unity of the Godhead. But even for John, these truths were seen as though reflected in a very imperfect mirror. For both Peter and John, they will only be known as they are when we see God face to face. All who belong to the Lord must drink in these teachings and must call others to reconcile themselves to God and God's ways. The Lord has spread four Gospels throughout the world. All are aids and guides for us in living faith & longing to see God.

THE REVELATION OF WHO WE ARE

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bede the Venerable

Our Lord and Redeemer leads us, his chosen ones, through the labors of this life to the blessedness of a life which knows no labor. At times the Gospel describes the hard work of our life in this world and at other times the palm of eternal rewards. He shows us his sufferings and tells us that *“the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will give to each what his work has deserved”*. The psalmist repeats this by saying, *“Mercy and judgment I will sing to you, O Lord”*. Those who despise the Lord’s mercy when he grants it will rightfully be terrified of his judgement.

When the Lord was with us, he once took three chosen apostles up a mountain and was transfigured before them. He revealed himself as he really is and as we will see him when he comes to and for us in glory. But this also reveals what the saints will see in themselves when they hear the judge say: *“Come, blessed of my Father! Come into possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”*. He does this, symbolically, after the disciples have completed the “six days” of good works that transform them inwardly so that they are fit to enter into their reward. It is this transformed person which is revealed by Christ in his transfiguration. We are to become like Christ and even like Moses and Elijah—if we have faithfully carried out the tasks entrusted to us by our Lord and Master.

The Lord made manifest the fact that the bodies of all the chosen will be of great brightness after their resurrection. *“Then shall the just shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father”*. If anyone should go on to ask what the garments white as snow represent in the transfiguration, we can properly understand them to point toward the Church of the saints. It will be purified from every blemish of iniquity. The Church is to be the living fulfillment of the promises of the Lord given through Moses and Elijah, through the Law and the prophets. They were seen as in majesty, we are told, because that is the reflection of their fidelity in proclaiming the word and salvation of God for his Chosen People and for all the Peoples of the world.

The more fully one tastes the sweetness of heavenly life, the more fully one will turn away from everything that used to please one here below. When the three disciples had seen the majesty of the Lord, and heard the voice of the Father, they forgot all earthly things. Peter could only think of staying with the glorious Lord and rejoicing in the great gifts the Father was revealing in Him. But no house, or tent, will be needed in the glory of heavenly life. There the light of divine contemplation will make all things peaceful and filled with love and joy. Peter didn’t know what he was saying, yet he was supremely right when he said, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here!”* In reality, the sole good of a human person is to enter into the joy of the Lord and to attend the Lord in contemplation.

How shall we find our ways to that blessed place? *“As he was still speaking, see, a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, listen to him”.*” When we do listen, he leads us back, with the disciples, to the work of caring for and loving others.