

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

&

THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

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Sunday

OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO THE SPIRIT

From an Easter Homily by Guerric 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.

Monday

AN EASTER HOMILY: John O Donoghue

We celebrate the Resurrection in a very sacred place Corcomroe, an abbey built in the twelfth century by the Cistercians. We are not here in this place to disturb those who are buried here nor the spirits of those who lived and prayed here for centuries when the monastery was functioning. We are here to bring the light of the Resurrection and of the dawn.

We are always on our way from darkness into light. Every morning, we come out of the dark territories of dreaming into waking awareness of the day. Every night, no matter how long, breaks again and the light of dawn comes. At birth each of us made a journey from darkness into light, from the warm secure darkness of the womb into the light of the world. So, we are no strangers to darkness and we are special friends of the light. A human life is guided, balanced and poised by the light of the mind and spirit of the person. In the darkness of our bodies, and particularly of our brains, the light of the mind is attuned and alive. These are the great primal thresholds in life, and one of the most beautiful and encouraging and most healing is the threshold of dawn, when darkness gives way to the light and novelty and wonder of a new day. Days are where we live our lives, where everything happens to us. It is lovely to think that at the heart of our belief in God, there is a young man, a carpenter from a small town, who braved in an extreme way the darkness of the human journey and took upon his tender shoulders, in a most brutal and harrowing way, all darkness everywhere. He took it to the summit of Calvary, where the darkness was turned into a light that never quenched.

On Resurrection morning the dark and lonesome cross was turned upside down. When the cross hits your life, a loneliness, a blindness and a darkness come all around you. Darkness and loneliness are the worst parts of suffering. The wonder of the Resurrection is that this darkness is opened out and at the heart of the darkness a secret light was discovered. Each one of us who has come here has not come to this place just out of curiosity, we have come because we know the need in our lives and we know the frailty that is in our hearts and minds. No matter how assured or competent we may feel, there is none of us who has not large territories of fear in our hearts, fear of sharing ourselves, of opening ourselves, of entering life. This is why we come to this ancient holy monastery, before the dawn to let the new tender light of the Resurrection touch our helpless fear and transfigure it and open it into courage. WE come here also because we have been hurt in our lives. One of the beauties of Easter morning is that the light that comes with Christ is a gentle and penetrating light. There is no hurt anywhere within us, no matter in what crevice it might be buried, but that the light of this Easter can reach and heal it.

Tuesday

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.

Wednesday

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.

Thursday

IT IS EASTER: Fr Carlo Carretto

Life and death are but 2 aspects of one and the same thing, as also sorrow and joy, light and darkness, cold and heat. It is as if the real were cut in half by a door. It was with good reason that Christ presented himself in this way: 'I am the door'. The door is the same one on both sides. The earth, the visible, the sensible, time, and space, are on this side; heaven, the eternal, the infinite are on the other side. But everything is one, logical, and true.

The door that is Christ is Lord at once of the here and the beyond, as Christ is crucified here and glorious beyond. To become immortal, to enter into the glory of the Risen Christ, every person must pass through the door, and the one who opens and closes it is the Lord. As the book of Revelation says "If I open no one closes".

This passage is called Easter, and the first to make it was Christ the Lord _as it is said "This is the Pasch of the Lord". Everything on this side of the door has its meaning and can be understood only in function of, in the embrace of, what is beyond. Short of this relationship, the succession of things here below cannot involve the real, and you use up your life without seeing. Things in time without any reference to the eternal acquire no meaning. They are as nothing, like dried up leaves. Jesus himself said "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworms destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal"

The resurrection of Christ gives meaning and life to every creature, as created by the Father, and actualized in view of, and through Jesus Christ. And creatures through him, have 2 faces: one crucified, here, and one glorious beyond. No person can escape this reality, and this is why the death of each of us has a sorrowful face in reality and a glorious face in hope. The passage is always a terrible trial, like coming to a boundless sea and then there is the explosion of joy as you watch the sea open. There is always the painful wait and then the sudden light. The wait is yours, the light is God's.

And it is gratuitous. You can never claim you deserve it. On the contrary! No merit has the power to open the door. It is the gift of God's love that is the key to this impassable lock. What he closes no one can open. But his will is always prompt to open for he came that we may have life and have it to the full. How often have I asked "Why am I still here?" And the reply is ever the same. You must learn to love. For beyond the door there is nothing but love.

Friday

WHAT DID THEY DO?

from Gethesemani Homilies by Fr Matthew Kelty OCSO

During the 40 days after the rising of Christ from the dead, it is not particularly difficult to imagine what the disciples did. They surely gathered in groups large and small and talked together about what had happened since the Lord entered their lives. There is healing in sharing, and in this sharing something new was created. The Gospel story began to take shape and the genesis of the Church began as creative gestation.

Overwhelmed, bewildered, and frightened, Christ's friends went back over the last 3 years and tried in some way to put it all together, if only by remembering what He said, what He did, and where, and when. Now and again perhaps, Christ took his place among them for comfort and encouragement, filling in details perhaps or being sure their memory was correct.

Their initial grief was a human reaction to the mystery of death and loss. The enormity of His tragic death, followed so soon by His glorious Resurrection was all a bit much to cope with.

We can see at this distance the marvel that was shaping their days. Call it the beginning of liturgical life if you will. We too gather as they did, we reminisce as they did. We tell again the story as they did, and then act it out in the memorial meal, as they did.

Yet, it was far more than mere memory. We know they did not grasp it fully yet, that Christ lives on. It is not just a memory, we do not merely read the story or hear it, we do it.

We do it time and time again for a lifetime. We do it from beginning to end. In that sense we mourn the death of Jesus for a lifetime, we celebrate His birth and all else to the Rising, over and over again, each time as a grace, a gift and we grasp just a bit more what it means.

The gift of a long life means participation in the greatest of human events. In terms of salvation once is enough. In terms of a full grasp, a lifetime is but a beginning. Yet who would say even a lifetime of contemplation is enough? Rather only eternity will suffice.

The one who came walking on the shore of the lake said to this one, then to that one, "Come follow me" says the same to us. They could in no way sense what it would mean. Neither can we.

So, we gather in prayer, we talk about him, we hear the story again, and we break the bread and drink the cup and are seized up in the mystery of God come among us. The Lord is Risen. How blessed are we.

Saturday

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.