

THE OCTAVE OF OUR EASTER CELEBRATION

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Sunday

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!

Monday

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.

Tuesday

EASTER

from the Present Christ by Fr. John Main OSB

We celebrate Easter liturgically over a few days, but we discover its meaning only in a lifetime. Each year I hear the words of St. Paul read out during the ceremonies and there seems to become richer, sharper and more real, urgent and yet more mysterious, each year. By baptism we were buried in him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendor of the Father, so we might set our feet on the path of life.

To know this is to be a Christian, not just a member of a body or a sect or even a church but a joyful personal disciple. It is known that this new path of life is already opened up for us because of the energies set free by the Resurrection. From our point of view we may see only the same tired, worn, old paths, but if this resurrection energy has touched us, if we have touched it in our hearts, the new path of life stands out brilliant and dominant, transcending all the old ways. As the snows of winter melted in our garden here a carpet of brown and withered leaves from last fall was exposed. We have to penetrate beyond the surface to make contact with the new life of the resurrection.

The resurrection is the eternal sign of our invitation to share in the glory, the complete realization of Christ. Just what does this new resurrection life mean? Does it have personal meaning for each of us, or is it like a news item that everybody talks about and nobody feels involved in? We find the answer, I think, in the New Testament accounts of the resurrection. They all make it transparently clear that the Risen Jesus could be seen and recognized only with the eyes of faith. We hear and see the good news, but until the moment that it engages our absolute attention, by name, we fail to recognize it. When we do, all thought of self evaporates in the overwhelming joy of the reality, so much greater than us. When the Risen Lord appears to Mary, she is described as “turning” twice. For all of us this is the twofold conversion that unfolds throughout a lifetime, the total conversion that demands absolute harmony of mind and heart. To be wise we must learn to know with the heart. To see we must learn to see with the eyes of the heart- with love.

Wednesday

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 wonderful than this?

Thursday

LIVING TOGETHER

from Life Together by Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. After all Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. In the end all the disciples abandoned him. On the cross he was all alone, surrounded by, surrounded by criminals and the jeering crowd. He had come for the express purpose of bringing peace to the enemies of God. So, Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There many find their mission, their work.

For the believer, the physical presence of other Christians is a sort of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. With great yearning the imprisoned apostle Paul calls "my beloved son in the faith". He wants to see his beloved Timothy again and have him near. The aged John knows the joys in his own people will be complete only when he can come to them and speak to them face to face instead of using paper and ink.

The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian living in the diaspora recognizes the nearness of a fellow Christian, a physical sign of the greatest presence of the triune God. In their loneliness, both the visitor and the one visited recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body. They receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility and joy. They receive each other's blessings as the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, if there is so much happiness and joy even in a single encounter of one Christian with another, what inexhaustible riches must invariably open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in daily community life with other Christians! It is easily forgotten that the community of Christians is a gift of grace from the kingdom of God.

Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it is a brief single encounter or the daily community of many years, Christian community is solely this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that from eternity we have chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united in eternity. Let us truly be grateful for every experience of Christian community we have.

Friday

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.

Saturday

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.