

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 be equivalent to the words we hear in the Gospel about Jesus. Mary Magdalene 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 afterward we may never taste death! 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 it 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

ANGELUS MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS

The Monday after Easter is also called the *Monday of the Angel* because we recall the meeting of the angel with the women who arrived at Jesus's tomb (Mt 28:1-15). The angel said to them: "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen." This expression "He has risen" goes beyond human capacity. Even the women who had gone to the tomb and had found it open and empty could not confirm "He has risen", but they could only say that the tomb was empty. "He has risen" is a message. Only an angel could say that Jesus had risen, only an angel with the authority to be the bearer of a heavenly message, with the power given by God to say it, just as an angel, only an angel, had been able to say to Mary: "you will conceive a son, and he will be called the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:31-32). This is why we call it Monday of the Angel because only an angel with the power of God can say Jesus has risen.

Matthew the evangelist narrates that on the dawn of Easter "there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it". That large stone, which was supposed to be the seal of the victory of evil and death, was put underfoot, it became the footstool of the angel of the Lord. All of the plans and defenses of Jesus' enemies and persecutors were in vain. The image of the angel sitting on the stone of the sepulchre is the concrete, visible, manifestation of God's victory over evil, of Christ's victory over the prince of this world, of the victory of light over darkness. Jesus' tomb was not opened by a physical phenomenon, but by the Lord's intervention. The angel's appearance, Matthew continues, "was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow". These details are symbols that confirm the intervention of God himself, bearer of a new era, of the last times of history because with Jesus' resurrection, begins the last times of history which could last thousands of years, but they are the last times.

There is a twofold reaction to this intervention of God. That of the guards who cannot face the overwhelming power of God and are shaken by an interior earthquake. The power of the Resurrection overthrows those who had been used to guarantee the apparent victory of death. And what did those guards have to do? Go to those who had given them orders to keep guard and tell the truth. They had a choice to make: either tell the truth or allow themselves to be convinced by those who had given them the order to keep guard. And the only way to convince them was money. And those poor people, sold the truth, and with the money in their pockets they went on to say: "No, the disciples came and robbed the body". The "lord" money, even here, in Christ's resurrection, is capable of having the power to deny it. The women's reaction is very different because they were expressly invited by the angel of the Lord not to be afraid: "Do not be afraid!" and not to seek Jesus in the tomb. In the end, they were not afraid.

We can reap a precious teaching from the angel's words: let us never tire of seeking the risen Christ who gives life in abundance to those who meet him. To find Christ means to discover peace in our hearts. The same women of the Gospel, after initially being shaken experience great joy in finding the Master alive. In this Easter Season, my wish is that everyone might have the same spiritual experience, welcoming the joyful proclamation of Easter in our hearts, in our homes and in our families: "Christ, having risen from the dead dies now no more; death will no longer have dominion over him". This is the Easter proclamation: "Christ is alive, Christ accompanies my life, Christ is beside me". Christ knocks at the door of my heart so I can let him in, Christ is alive. In these days of Easter, it would be good for us to repeat this: "the Lord is alive".

This certainty moves us to pray today and throughout the Easter Season: "*Regina Caeli, Laetare* - that is, Queen of Heaven, rejoice". The angel Gabriel had greeted her thus the first time: "Rejoice, full of grace!" (Lk 1:28). Now Mary's joy is complete: Jesus lives, Love has conquered. May this be our joy as well!

Tuesday

WHEN JESUS CALLS A PERSON'S NAME

A reflection excerpted from texts by B. Moore & C. Stuhmüller

Between any experience of Christ in faith and its fulfillment in face-to-face vision when he comes again, there lies a lifetime of witness—of going and telling to our own place and time and community, and in our own way, the joyful news of Jesus' resurrection. Thomas a Kempis said of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the Risen Jesus: "Love knows no rest until it finds what it seeks, possesses what it loves and gains what it desires." Our finding, gaining and possessing are all by way of faith. Mary too didn't recognize Jesus until he spoke her name. To each of those who belong to him, he speaks their name, personally and intimately.

We seek Jesus and long for his presence, but we can't find him unless he finds us first. His one word to Mary reached into her heart and mind, and illumined her whole self. Only then did she realize he has truly Risen. She discovered it through her love. To be found by Jesus, we must accept him on his own terms. He did not let Mary cling to him and prolong the ecstatic moment of recognition but said: "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father'."

To be found by Jesus is to be called to obedient faith. He sends us to be found in the community of faith. Remember, Mary was initially ridiculed by the disciples when she told them of Jesus' resurrection.

Obedient faith not only means unselfish sharing of God's gifts but accepting the price. We have to turn as well to the Scriptures. They can provide the clues we need to find the meaning of the resurrection and our obedience. But Scripture has to be read in the light of Jesus' resurrection and our experience of it in love and faith.

To be found by Jesus is to let your heart and mind be flooded with a light beyond your control or comprehension. That costs significant time in prayer and contemplation. But the obedience with which we have to follow God's will in our daily life finds its law in our prayer. We read the Bible, we remain silent and wait upon God's words—whether it be about our reading themselves or about our daily life and problems, or about our relations with others. Like Mary Magdalene, we then return to our daily life and our community and to be people who have seen the Lord, and heard him speak our name. "My soul waits for the Lord who is my help and my shield; the earth is full of the Lord's goodness". These are Jesus' gifts to me; my task is to share them.

Wednesday

OUR JOURNEY TO EMMAUS

A Meditation by Karl Rahner

Among the mysteries of the gospel, so human and simultaneously so divine and consoling, is to be numbered the story of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus. If we read this story aright we recognize with amazement that it is a story about ourselves. It is a part because the same thing happens again and again in our lives, and it is the whole because our entire life is summed up in this story. As we read we notice that we are actually passing through our own Emmaus story and we hope and pray that our story too may have the same ending.

They had been so full of hope, but now they believe that they can hope no longer. The way matters have turned out is far from being in conformity with the interpretation they had placed on their hopes. They supposed that what they were hoping for were deliverance and freedom; they were disappointed by what they actually experienced. Our understanding of our hopes, and so the hopes themselves, are always still in process of development. The point at which these hopes arrive does not depend merely on ourselves. Their hopes were nailed to the Cross, and when he was buried they believed everything was over. They are now running away.

But they are talking, just like ourselves. It is meaningless to do so but by the fact they are doing it, they are bearing witness against their own conclusions. In doing so they give God the opportunity of joining them in their discussion. How often it happens that grace is actually present in our very flight from it!

A stranger meets us; it is the Lord. Our eyes look about joylessly but are held by him whom they fail to recognize. It is salvation to recognize him, but even a clear vision cannot bring this about. They let the stranger speak; they really listen. He shows them quietly how everything in the world and in scripture contains this single message: That the one fulfillment of all hope is to be found precisely where they believed they have been deceived. He presents the facts as something which he accepts, something precious, something with an intrinsic meaning: Precisely this descent of Jesus into failure and death is the way by which he enters upon his blessed destiny. This applies to Jesus and to Jesus alone; to Jesus, as believed in and to others only as they believe in him.

They offer the pilgrim a roof and thereby come home themselves. By breaking bread with them he roots himself in their hearts, and they recognize the truth. Truly he is risen. How often we ourselves have experienced the same thing. We are indeed still on the way to Emmaus and our eyes are still veiled. However much our hearts may have been kindled by his word, in the last analysis, he continues to walk with us unrecognized.

We are still on the way to the Last Supper of eternal life, where the Lord will gird himself in order to give us the wine of inexpressible joy. We are still on the way so we need not wonder at the fact that our heart constantly becomes weary, angry, and complains at the disappointment of its hopes. Even a way such as this can lead to the Emmaus of our own lives, where we shall know the Lord in the breaking of bread.

Thursday

WHAT IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION?

A reflection from an Easter homily by Gueric 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 arose, 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.

Friday

HELPING ONE ANOTHER MEET CHRIST RISEN

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Benedict Groeschel

If you ever get the chance to go to the Holy Land visit the small chapel just outside Capernaum commemorating Jesus' breakfast with Peter and some of the apostles. Walk along the beach to the rock that is said to have served Jesus as a table when he invited not just disciples but very weary fishermen to have something to eat with him.

What did Jesus do? He thoughtfully offered a respite and refreshment to some who had been working hard but not accomplished what they wanted and were discouraged and tired. It was a simple deed of human concern that also became a revelation of the Risen Lord. The God of revelation is an awesome God. The God who raised Jesus from the dead and then sent him to us is perhaps even more awesome. The fact that the Risen Jesus comes only to those who are willing to believe doesn't change this a bit but point to faith and the gift of seeing Christ, and God, in human deeds.

Faith discloses that behind the kindness and thoughtfulness of a simple sharing of some bread and fish lies endless and measureless thoughtfulness and kindness. One of the possible reasons why faith is given us is to help us see this presence of God and who God is. That, after all, is what Jesus was sent to show us. Once we see it we find an inexhaustible font of gladness to carry us through the ups and downs of everyday life. Walk along the shore of the Sea of Galilee early in the morning, and feel the coolness of the breeze brush your cheeks and help you recall simple truths and joys.

It is as though Jesus has gently said, Peace be with you! Do not be afraid! I am present in the lake and the breeze and that stone just above the waterline. I am present everywhere and in everyone and only want to disclose myself in the tiny marvels I have created and hidden around each of the corners you will turn in your winding journey toward my Kingdom. Expect me in faith and be surprised and refreshed. I have shared this because I want to testify to God's loving and refreshing presence everywhere and in everyone. By revealing this divine presence to you I offer you too a share in the peace and new life and energy that always come when we encounter our Lord and God. That is one of the tiny but vital gifts that Easter brings. Jesus continues to reveal to us the wonders God gives us as he calls us from daily tasks to a meal with Him in the mornings of our days.

Saturday

What Do We Fear?

A reflection from Brian Moore & Carroll Stuhlmüller

Most of those who first met the risen Jesus reacted with fear. Why were they afraid? Were they afraid of the differentness of Jesus? All of us tend to react with fear when we find ourselves in situations or circumstances that we don't know how to handle. Jesus' disciples reacted in that way when he walked on the water and now he's appearing and disappearing suddenly and coming to rooms when the doors are locked! Only ghosts do that! What's going on?

Two quotations from Second Isaiah may help us. "Things of the past I foretold ahead of time; they went forth from my mouth and I made sure that you heard them. Suddenly, by surprise, I took action and they came to be. Now I announce new things to you, hidden things of which you knew not; now and not long ago they are brought into being!" This prophesy is fulfilled in the Risen Jesus.

We learn from the Gospels that the Pharisees had decided that God wasn't going to do anything that wasn't foretold in Scripture. Nowhere in Scripture is that said to be the case. Yet they used it as a reason to reject Jesus! They were insisting on a kind of continuity that would exclude radical newness!

Jesus and his resurrection are radically new. It isn't clearly foretold anywhere in Scripture, though Jesus can show the disciples texts which can be interpreted as fulfilled by what has happened to him. If you already believe you can see "fulfillment" but if you don't everything seems utterly unexpected, strange.

How do we react to the radically new things that our God asks of us? The disciples who first saw Jesus thought they were seeing a ghost. They had to accept that in the resurrection one is not constrained by time and space in the ordinary ways. So Jesus emphasizes his physical reality, that which seems the "same", so they will believe it's really him. "Yes, it's really me! I am "the same" person who spent so much time with and learned so much from." Of course, their ears hadn't been open to the newness of what he taught or told then was coming. God saves us in a wholly unexpected ways—not by restoring Israel to what it was in the past but calling it to something wholly different.

The same is the case for us. When we worked so hard to learn all the rules and customs that govern ordinary living we don't want them thrown out so we have to start all over again. Yet those rules say that when you kill a person he stays dead. But that isn't what has happened. How many other "rules" is Jesus' resurrection going to upset? What can we count on?

We can be sure only of God's love and of the love and support of those who have accepted Jesus' rising and are willing to follow him wherever he leads—even beyond all that they have been used to. That is the only assurance Jesus gives us. Is it enough for you? We have a community of believers to support us. That is Jesus' gift. If we support them the life we live together can show the beauty and joy and peace of following Jesus into God's newness.