

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION
and
THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

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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 wondrous 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 wondrous 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 forever, 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 that 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 would be welcomed when they entered their eternal home.

This is an attitude the Church and all its members need to foster in every age. It is a firm hope for 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 they seem 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 as 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.S

Wednesday

THE RECIPROCALLY HIDDEN & UNHIDDEN

A Reflection developed from a Sermon by Cardinal Newman

What is the nature of Christ's presence in the Church after his resurrection? He came and went as he pleased and fastened doors were no impediment. Yet when he was present his disciples didn't know him. He appeared to two disciples who were going toward Emmaus and while he talked with them their hearts burned within them yet their eyes and hearts were somehow unable to recognize him. They weren't conscious of what was going on when it was happening but later they did remember. People received impressions but were unable to see what reality they pointed to.

Now let us observe when it was that their eyes were opened. It was especially, but not exclusively, when the Lord broke the Bread. Stress is laid on this in the Gospels, especially in St. Luke. When the two disciples returned from Emmaus "*they told what things had been done on the road and how he was recognized in the breaking of the bread*".

The disciples had not recognized Jesus during his ministry as both the Son of God and the One who was to suffer and die and rise again. It is as though the Resurrection had so united the One who appeared as a human being, and was really divine. They were united in such a way that after the resurrection Jesus could only be recognized when both were recognized.

So it was ordained that Christ should not be both seen and known unless he was "seen" and "known" in the two ways at once. First, his disciples saw him, but only later was the full truth known truly. Only by faith do we know Christ to be present and we do not see him at all in the bodily way. But he never was recognized in his reality by ordinary sight alone. In the case of the two disciples, when he opened their eyes to see him by faith he at once vanished.

Christ removes his visible presence now and leaves us only a memorial. He vanishes from ordinary sight that he might be present to us in a sacrament. In order to connect his visible presence with his invisible but fuller presence, Christ, for an instant, manifested himself to the bodily eyes of two disciples, and then to The Twelve but took this opportunity to open their inner eyes to faith so they could see both his visible and invisible reality. He manifested himself, if I may speak in this way, as he passed from ordinary sight, turned into a hiding place that gave no full knowledge of the truth, to a knowledge of his full truth but one that hides what ordinary sight sees. Both are his gift to us and he bids us not to be disturbed by this but to believe. Faith actually shows us both the hidden and unhidden together.

Thursday

WHAT DO WE FEAR?

A Reflection from Brian Moore & Carroll Stuhlmueller

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 opened to the newness of what he taught or told them was coming. God saves us in a wholly unexpected way—not by restoring Israel to what it was in the past but by 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 didn't want them thrown out so we had 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.

Friday

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 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 that 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 known 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.

Saturday

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 confessing 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.