

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER - C

April 07, 2013

"As Christ Is Risen so Is His People"

Revelation 1:4-18

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the LORD our God; that is, in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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The angel asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" And so, throughout the seven weeks of Easter we say, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen."

There are many different ways that the message of the angel at the empty tomb has been said, but, make no mistake about it, the significance of what was being communicated then remains the same today. The importance of this message cannot be over stated; for there is no message that is more important; there is no message that is more profound and significant for you right here today than that, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

We know, we believe, we trust, we confess that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the tomb on that first Easter morning declaring victory over sin, death and the devil. It could not be stated louder or clearer. We say in the creeds that on "the third day He rose from the dead." And, we also say that the Lord Jesus Christ "ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty." But, what we do not think much about is, what our risen and ascended Lord is doing until the time when He will, "come to judge the quick and the dead."

Today in the Book of the Revelation of St. John we have a glimpse of our risen and glorified Lord waiting to return to judge the quick and the dead. Here is Christ at work. Revelation is about our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ watching over and looking after His Bride the Church throughout the ages until He returns again. The overarching theme is that Christ is still risen, that He is on the throne of heaven, that He stands amongst the seven lamp-stands of the churches, and that all things are in His control.

Nothing that happens is out of His control. There is no fate, no luck, no chance but everything is happening under the Lord's control and watchful eye. This is multi layered, the Lord of salvation, and the Church, and the ages, in the book of Revelation is about the events in the whole world, in the whole church throughout the ages, the things of this congregation, and the things of your very life. Revelation speaks to all of that. The risen Christ is concerned about all of that.

Christ is risen and He is on His throne watching over all things. As Christ is risen and victorious so is His Church and His people. And the Lord will continue to work all things for the good of His Church until the day of His return when He will judge us. That neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

That is what Revelation is all about. It speaks a word of promise and encouragement to us today. The book was not written to confuse but to comfort the people of God, even in the most extreme circumstances, when the world seems to be falling apart and when we need to keep on going. It was written to comfort people who were troubled by the times. To comfort people during those early times when Christians were being severely persecuted, when the Church was being rocked by heresy, charlatan self serving leaders, and when the preaching of the Gospel was running cold in the face of trouble.

It was written to comfort people who were troubled by the times, even during times like ours. Just look around, there are ongoing problems in the Middle East. Plenty of earthquakes and unusually powerful weather. It is a time when governments, and institutions, and schools have lost their moral foothold.

We ride the economic waves and do not know from one day to the next whether or not we will sink or be dashed upon the rocks. And, it is not like trouble and hardship is everywhere else either. Look at our lives; family trouble, health trouble, mental trouble, sadness, depression and on it goes. No wonder lots of charlatans have made names for themselves over wild interpretations of Revelation. But, be clear about this, Revelation was written for people who are looking for comfort as they see that so many of the stable things of this world are falling apart.

For, the message is that Christ is risen, that He is on the throne of heaven, and that nothing is ever going to happen on this earth, in His Church, or in your life that is not first passing by His overseeing eye.

Revelation was written with the message that Easter is ongoing. That the Lord Jesus Christ is still risen. That He has victory over the grave. That He is on His throne and is continually watching over His Bride the Church and that He is working everything in your life for the good - that is your eternal salvation.

Think about what that means. No matter how bad things appear to be, there is nothing that is happening that the Lord does not have His hand in. No matter how far down in the pits life seems to be, you are still forgiven, death has still been destroyed, a place still waits for you in heaven, and Jesus is still working everything so that you get there.

To be sure, pretty much all of us can locate ourselves geographically. But can we find our bearings spiritually? Some days seem to run smoothly, without a hitch but then there are those other days. Life gets far too complicated far too fast for us. Our Christian beliefs and standards of right and wrong do not change but society constantly wants to change us. And we fear, we feel alone and abandoned. Where is God in all this? Why does not He do something?

The Apostle John knew these feelings of abandonment during his exiled on the island of Patmos. The early Christians knew these feelings too. That's why Revelation is so important for us. As St. John, the eyewitness says, Jesus, the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the One who was dead and is now alive - the Living One - is on the throne, and you are right before Him.

We are right before Him and He is right before us. The Apostle describes a picture of the glorified Christ that defies the imagination and the attempt of any artist to reproduce it. The risen Lord is "dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest." He wears the garments of high position; He moves about the lamp-stands as a priest and king, carrying out His sacred duties in the heavenly temple.

"His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow," like God, the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13); in the Old Testament, symbolic of wisdom and great age. "His eyes were like blazing fire," penetrating everywhere in order to enlighten and purify. "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace," indestructible with nothing able to stand in their way. "And His voice was like the sound of rushing water," The prophet Ezekiel had heard it this way too (Ez. 43:2).

"In His right hand He held seven stars," the seven angels responsible for the seven churches. Meaning that the churches themselves were in His powerful yet tender hands. "Out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" able to penetrate and to cut both ways (Heb. 4:12-13). "His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." Moses and a few others had seen this glory, the face of the Living God, and where surprised that they lived to tell about it (Ex. 24:9-11, Ex. 33:23).

When St. John saw Jesus as the Light that outshines the sun, and the Priest and King who crosses the barriers of time and space and life and death, he "fell at His feet as though dead." Then the Lord Jesus Christ reached down and put His right hand on John to assure him he was still alive and that the Almighty God in the person of Jesus is there to bless rather than to judge. "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

During His earthly life, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12).

The Apostle John saw this revelation of the Eternal and Victorious One before he wrote to the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor. He was given this revelation so he could pass it on as a gift of assurance from God to the Church for all time. We are secure in Christ, we are secure in the Living One, no matter how bad things seem to get.

St. John speaks and delivers, "Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come" from the great I AM, Yahweh, the eternal God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. "And from the seven spirits before the throne." St. John reminds us of the seven fold Spirit (Is. 11:2), the Holy Spirit and His modes of operation in the world for the good of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Word of God, the "faithful witness." The One who gave testimony before Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:33-38) and sealed His confession with His own death on the cross. He is "the Firstborn from the dead": as a sacrificial first fruit, Jesus rose again to guarantee a harvest of resurrection for all who are buried with Him (Rom. 6:3-4). He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth." Presidents, prime ministers, and dictators of the world might rule their temporary empires but Jesus rules over all of them and beyond all of them.

This is the grace and peace of God, the Gospel message that St. John delivered to the suffering Church: In God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son, who was martyred before you and is now at your side as the Living One. He is at your side to guide you and strengthen you. He is the Good Samaritan who lifts you out of the pit, cleansing and healing your wounds.

Some people say that the Bible is the history of humankind searching God. But, in reality, from Genesis through Revelation, the message is the successful search of God for us! He is the One who comes after us to save us, to forgive us, to strengthen us, to encourage us, to give us life, to give it to us abundantly, to give us peace, even in the face of violence, and finally to burst open our graves in final victory on the last Day.

He has come, is coming, and will come again! The Lord says: "Do not be afraid, I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!" In Jesus holy name. Amen.