

## EASTER SUNDAY AT GRACE

April 16, 2017

"Christ Has Risen, He is Alive!"- St. Matthew 28:1-10

The Apostle St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "IF Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).

Friends in Christ, the message of the resurrection is important, present, and relevant to the lives of every single human being. And that, I dare say, means you, and everybody you know, and everybody you have ever met and everybody you are likely to ever meet. The angel at the Open Tomb spoke with the urgency of this message: "Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead'" (vs. 7). A bit later Jesus Himself met these women and told them Not to be afraid and also GO and tell my brothers (vs. 10). The resurrection is both surprising and frightening at first. Surprising because no one has ever done it before! Frightening because they saw Him die, and there He was standing in front of them!

The Scripture says: "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men" (vs. 4). Suddenly God made all the enemies of Jesus look weak and ridiculous. What fools they were to try to control the Lord of heaven and earth, of life and death. The very thing that the enemies of God were determined to block, happened. They did not want an empty grave! Yet there it was! The stone was rolled away, and Jesus was gone. Where was He?

Peter says in his first epistle: "Christ was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19). Before Jesus showed Himself alive to His disciples on earth, He went down to hell to tell all His enemies there that He was alive and victorious! Jesus' decent into hell was not to suffer more or because He had to. No! Jesus suffered all that was necessary on the cross and it was over when He said, "It is finished."

You may not always think of it, as you should, and, it may not be the focus of every thought, word, and deed, as it should be, but this is really Good News for you and me. Let's face it, there are few things in life that are certain; some would say, "death and taxes"

and I am not all that sure even about taxes. Death is certain though. Of all the things that a person knows when they draw their first breath, is that there will be a last one. A beginning means that there is also an ending. It is the place that we all want to stay away from, and yet it is the place where we will all end up. We all know that we are going to die someday, and yet when death comes it is always a shock, it is always sudden, it is always painful, and it is always an occasion for tears and grief.

God created within us the "will to live" and that is good. No one wants to die and it was not the intent of God when He created us. But, this morning readings put us right in the middle of the very place that signifies death, that is a cemetery. A place we do not want to be, yet a place where we all end up. You and I will die someday. You and I are both sinners, **and the wages of sin is death.** But, the angel, the messenger of God, has some Good News for your death, and Good News for your sins. For we can now say with the Apostle Paul, that because of the resurrection of Jesus, that: **"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Rom. 8:38-39).

And yet, contrary to what many may think, what happens to our bodies matters to God. God created our bodies. He baptizes our bodies. He nourishes our bodies. He blesses our bodies. He makes our bodies His temple, His dwelling place. We are to glorify God with our bodies. What goes on with our bodies matters to God. It mattered enough for Him to send His Son to be conceived and born, to suffer in His body for our sakes, to take up our sin and death into His body, to have His body nailed to a tree and to die, and to rise from the dead in His body.

The body is what Easter is about. It's about God redeeming our bodies in the body of His Son. It's about the physical resurrection from the dead. The One who was crucified lives. His body that was pierced by nails and a spear is alive. That's the good news of Easter. Jesus who was dead now lives. The tomb is empty; the stone is rolled away; death has lost its death grip on humanity. The shroud has been pulled away; the disgrace of death has been swallowed up in God's victory. The tears of our grief are wiped away by the hand of God. Jesus lives! And yet, as we hear this message year after year, we still wonder, What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us?

It means, first of all, that Jesus is who He says He is. He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. He is everything

He said He is: the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the only way to the Father, the only door to heaven, the only Source of salvation.

Talk is plentiful, but resurrections are rare. Great teachers, moral philosophers, and ethical men we have aplenty. But men who rise from the dead after being nailed to a cross are another matter. There is only One in history who died and rose from the dead never to die again. Only One who was crucified and rose. You can't ignore the resurrection. There is no neutral ground on a crucified and risen Jesus. Either He must be confessed and adored as Lord and Christ, or He must be denied and dismissed as a hoax and fraud. When St. Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers at Athens, he didn't mince a lot of words about planning, religious systems and philosophies. NO. He went straight to the cross, proclaimed Jesus crucified and raised from the dead.

Friends, the resurrection is the key. It is the historic fact that confronts the world. It is the pivotal point around which all of human history turns. Nothing has ever been the same in this world since that first Easter Sunday, early in the morning, when the women encountered an open, empty tomb.

Never mind this notion that the resurrection is a pious myth. Jesus was seen risen from the dead by over 500 people who were willing to go to a martyr's death confessing His Name. This was at a time when the Roman government and the Jewish authorities held all the cards. They had control in that region. If there had been a body to produce, they would have produced it, and put it on public display to silence the rumours of resurrection.

Remember Peter, who went from denier to preacher in 50 short days; from someone who was too **sheepish** to admit to a servant girl of being a disciple of Jesus, to one who preached Jesus to thousands at Pentecost. What happened to Peter in so short a time? Well, Jesus had risen from the dead, that's what happened, and Peter had seen Him, and heard Him, and eaten with Him. He was afraid of nothing because death was swallowed up and our risen Lord was with him.

The resurrection means that Jesus' death is the sufficient sacrifice for our sins. The Father has accepted the death of His Son and raised Him from the dead to prove it. When Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, the work of our redemption was actually finished, completed, done. Salvation was won. Nothing more needs to be done. Jesus has absorbed our sin into His body and nailed it to death. And now He has risen to say, "I won. I conquered death for you. Trust in me and not in your selves and you will never

die." The resurrection means that Jesus is true to His Word. He said He would rise from the dead in three days, and He did, contrary to the expectations of His slow to believe disciples. That means we can take Jesus at His Word when He says that those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Or when He says that the bread of His Supper really is His body, and the wine is His blood.

Or when He says that His ministers have His permission to forgive and retain sins in His stead. Those promises are sure. You can live and die with them. Christ will not lie to you or deceive you. Many other may lie or deceive, but Christ will not. His Word is true, and He is true to His Word. His rising from the dead shows it. This is our hope in Christ. Even though these bodies of ours are dying a tiny bit each day, yet they will live because Christ lives.

Every prayer for healing is answered "yes" for the believer in Christ - if not now, then in the resurrection on the Last Day. The resurrection means that the Jesus who comes to us in Baptism, in Absolution, and especially in the His Supper, is the One who died and rose again. The One who has conquered death comes to us and meets with us.

The women fled from the tomb that morning, trembling, bewildered, silent, fearful - until later that day when Jesus came to them. Then their fear gave way to gladness. And so it is also with us. We may know the facts of the resurrection. We may hear the report. But only a personal encounter with the crucified and risen Christ in Baptism, in the Absolution, in the Lord's supper, in His body the Church, will calm our trembling, quiet our fears, and open our mouths to tell others.

We meet Jesus where He has told us He would come to us - in His Word, in His Supper, in His Church, where even as few as two or three are gathered in His Name to receive His gifts, hear His Word, and learn from it. Our lives will never be the same again. Jesus has risen from the dead! Amen.

He is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Amen