

Easter Sunday - B

Holy Rosary Cathedral

1 April 2018

Feast of Hope

“The Resurrection of the Lord is our hope”¹ After his excruciating Death on the Cross, “on the first day of the week” – the day of the beginning of the new creation – Jesus rose from the grave, so that we, though destined to die, should not despair, terrified that with death life is completely finished, turned off like a switch that brings only impenetrable darkness.

This is one of the questions that most preoccupies men and women: is there anything after death? Is my life so limited, so small even, that it ends in nothingness? Easter gives us the answer. My life will overcome death because, with the Resurrection, Jesus entered into God’s glorious life, “and he entered there with our humanity, opening us to a future of hope.”² He is alive *for* us. He is *with* us because by his rising from the tomb “love has triumphed over hatred, life has conquered death, light has dispelled the darkness!”³

Christ broke the prison-bars of death’s domain. Only because he rose from the dead, triumphing over the cruel power of death, can he be

¹ St. Augustine, *Sermon* 261:1.

² Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Message for Easter (1 April 2013).

³ Francis, Easter Message *Urbi et Orbi* (5 April 2015).

alive and with us. He did not remain in the grave because, as the Son of God, he could not be held a prisoner of death (cf. Acts 2:24). No tomb could contain “the living one” (Rev 1:18), who is the source of life itself.⁴

Jesus Christ, crucified and buried, is risen with his glorified body, bringing us the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. This is the heart of the Gospel message. As St. Paul vigorously declares: “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15:14).

Sometimes people speak of the coming of Jesus into this world as if it were a temporary thirty-three year mission, one which was completed with his Death and Resurrection. After rising from the dead, he returned to the glory of God, they say, leaving the world and all its messiness behind. But in the Resurrection, Jesus does not strip away his humanity. No, he rose *in* and *with* his body, even though it was mysteriously glorified. That’s why we believe in the bodily Resurrection. And why the tomb was empty.

Here’s the point not to overlook. In his risen Body, Jesus will one day renew all of creation, bringing it to its final destiny. And that involves us personally. “I believe in the resurrection of the body” – that

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Urbi et Orbi* Message for Easter (16 April 2006).

is of *my* body – we recite in our Profession of Faith, “and life everlasting.” The end of our journey will be our share in Jesus’ Resurrection when the “new heavens and new earth” (Rev 21:1) will finally be brought about.

Ever since the dawn of Easter, when disciples found the empty tomb, a new Spring of hope has been awakened in us. Christ is risen to give us hope in the new creation that is our inheritance.

In truth, from Easter forward our resurrection has already begun, because Jesus risen from the dead brings about a new condition for humanity, and that means for me personally. We are now – I am now – forever linked, even chained, to the Risen Lord. Beginning with Baptism, Jesus himself lives in each of us, and in him we can already savour the joy of life with God, and a life without end.

Mary Magdalene’s Encounter with the Risen Lord – and Ours

But what does today’s Gospel, especially in describing the meeting of Mary Magdalene with the Risen Jesus, tell us about the significance of the Resurrection for us? What difference does it make to me today?

In his account of the events of that first Easter morning, John the Evangelist gives Mary Magdalene the most prominent role. It is almost as if he wished to tell us that a repentant sinner like her, having cast off her deeds of darkness, is rightly the first to experience the affection of

the Risen Lord.⁵ This is Jesus the Risen Good Shepherd, who not only seeks out the lost sheep but rewards with a party the return home of a prodigal child. Surely this tenderness on Jesus' part should encourage us on our journey. If we have fallen prey to indifference or neglect of him, today we just have to remind ourselves: if he wanted to encounter Mary Magdalene, why not even me?

Joy of Encounter

When Mary saw the stone removed from in front of the tomb, she called for Peter and John to help her understand what had happened. They came running, entered the tomb and found it empty, but they said nothing to relieve her worry. Mary stayed “weeping outside the tomb” (Jn 20:11). For a woman in distress, being overlooked or ignored by men is a story repeated down through the centuries.

But then, after seeing the two angels in the tomb, she saw someone whom she didn't recognize, a stranger, whom she supposed was the gardener (cf. Jn 20:15).

He inquired about why she was weeping, but Mary remained ignorant of who he was. Without faith, it is impossible “to see” the Risen One. Suddenly this Gardener calls her personally, and by name: “Mary!” There is a twist of irony here: she had been frantically searching for

⁵ Cf. Anthony Giambrone, “This is the night,” in *Praying with Saint John's Gospel*, ed. Peter John Cameron (Yonkers: Magnificat, 2013), 353.

Jesus' dead body, but now Jesus finds her.

It was only his gentle call to her that prompted Mary Magdalene to recognize Jesus. He pronounces her name just as the Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” (Jn 10:3). And then she, in turn, calls him “Teacher.” Not yet understanding that Jesus risen is transformed, she tries to cling to him as she would have before the Resurrection. But Jesus makes it clear that this earthly clinging is no longer possible. Something even better was in store!

For Us

Dear friends: what happened to Mary can happen to us as well. Every Christian is meant to live the same experience. So often we fail to recognize Jesus. He might be right there before us: in a troubled son or daughter; a difficult spouse or family situation; a neglected person clamouring for our attention. He is certainly there, but often disguised, in the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the abandoned, the marginalized whom we exile with such hard hearts to the fringes of society.

But as it was with Mary, so also with us. Jesus also calls us by name because he knows the heart of each one of us. Even if we often neglect his voice calling us to cast aside the works of our darkness to enter his world of light and life, he is there because he is risen.

We are all called to an encounter with the Risen Lord, an encounter which is intended to change our lives, to set us in a new

direction. All my yearning for being good, for overcoming what holds me back from experiencing real joy, find in Jesus the real possibility of fulfilment. With him, I can hope for a life that is good, full and eternal, for God himself has drawn near to me, carrying me home on his shoulders like a sheep that was lost but now is found.⁶

Such a personal, intimate experience of the Risen Jesus is meant for everyone. No one, no matter how seemingly distant, should feel excluded. The only condition for a living encounter with the Risen Lord is an openness to being changed and healed. If I am open to Jesus, he himself will find me. He will call me by name, because the Risen Lord wants me to be with him.

But the account does not end with the beauty of an encounter but with a mission, a sending out. Mary is given a mission of being “the Apostle to the Apostles” by bringing them the good news: “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 1:18). This is the message we too bring to others this Easter: “I have seen the Lord. He has called me by name because he loves me and has shown me his mercy.”

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Dear brothers and sister: most of us received Baptism as children. Our parents gave us biological life without being able to ask us whether or not we wanted to live, rightly convinced that it is good to be alive and

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Urbi et Orbi* Message for Easter (7 April 2012).

that life is a gift.

Together with the fragile gift of biological life our parents also ensured that we receive the guarantee of divine life in Baptism. As adults, it is up to us to make this gift our own, entering more and more radically into the meaning of our Baptism as a sharing in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Every year at Easter the Church invites us once again to immerse ourselves in the waters of Baptism, to pass from death to life, to become more authentic in our Christian way of life, to awaken us from our religious nonchalance that lacks dynamism and follow Jesus more closely as our true way, truth and life (cf. Jn 14:6).

And so now we renew those promises made for most of us long ago, and repeated yearly. But let us do so with meaning, letting Jesus enter into our lives not just to console us but to change us and bring us closer to him and one another.

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