

Easter Sunday April 4, 2010

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

This is our day, the Church's day. On Easter we celebrate that central, decisive act of God which is the absolute center of our faith. As the Psalmist says, "On this day the Lord has acted, we will rejoice, and be glad in it".

On Easter we celebrate the ongoing source of our life and our faith—the continuing presence of the resurrected Jesus. | | And there are at least two sides to that. On the one hand, Easter is about Jesus. | | It is about a man who was dead and suddenly is alive—alive in a new and special and wonderful way—alive as no one had ever been alive before.

Easter is the vindication of Jesus—Easter shows that the cross, which had seemed to be both failure and defeat, is in fact neither. By the resurrection, God proclaims that the life, ministry, suffering and death of Jesus are the way, the true way, to the fullness of new life. By the resurrection, God shows both that the power of obedient, self-giving love is the greatest power in the universe, and that the mystery of sacrifice is the secret heart of all creation. Christ is risen—and even death is powerless over such love.

All of this is real. All of this is historical. It all happened a long time ago—under Pontius Pilate. And today we remember that, and today we celebrate that.

But the historical part is always the easy part. That's because history is conveniently distant. History can be appreciated without personal involvement; it can be celebrated without changing us. It's not that difficult for us to be a people who celebrate Easter.

On the other hand, what is harder, and more important, is for us to become an Easter People—a people for whom what we remember today gives shape, hope, meaning and direction to the whole of our lives. For that to happen, Easter needs to be about *us*, as much as it is about Jesus.

One way that Easter is about us is that the Resurrection means that Jesus continues; | | his life and his work are not just things of the past. All that Jesus did and stood for during his earthly ministry continue, and are part of the present in a unique way. After all, Jesus does not continue the way the teaching and example of a great historical figure, like Socrates or Ghandi, continue. Instead, he is with us now.

Instead, the very same life that Jesus lived continues to be lived, and the very same work that Jesus did continues to be done, and Jesus himself continues to be present—here, today, now. This is what we are about; this is what the Church is about.

For we are his body, and his life is our life, and his ministry is our ministry. The Resurrection is about us—and it shows us that what it means to be Baptized People is to be nothing less than the re-presentation of Jesus to our world, and to our communities, in our generation. Easter is about us, and one part of that is that we are to continue our Lord's presence in the world.

Now, another important part of what that means is that we, like Jesus, should be found among the living—and not among the dead. Outside the tomb, and not inside. Now, that's not as easy as it sounds.

If you want to have just one thing to take home from this Easter sermon, let it be this question: Have you ever thought about the love it took for Jesus to walk out of that tomb and return to Jerusalem? Have you ever thought about the love it took for Jesus to walk out of that tomb and return to Jerusalem?

We'll never know what happened behind the stone on Easter morning. That's a private moment between The Father and the Son. But as far as I'm concerned, that's not the greatest wonder of Easter. The greatest wonder of Easter is that there was enough love in that man Jesus to move him to return; to return to the place of his pain and his humiliations, to return to the people who had deserted him, and denied him, and ridiculed him, and hurt him, and hurt him again—when he had dared to make his offering of himself.

Remember, it was quiet, and it was safe, in the darkness of that cave, under the shroud, all wrapped up, behind the rock. No one could *get at* Jesus anymore; and the pain was finally over. Among the dead—hidden away, peaceful, protected and safe—that must have been wonderful; that must have been a very tempting place to stay. They had hurt him; they had done their worst; and their worst was very, very bad. But that was over now.

Still, the Father wanted him to go back. The Father willed that Jesus be found where life is—out there, away from the shroud and the wrappings, past the stone, among the people who had hurt him so badly.

And on Easter we celebrate the love that led him back. Not back in wrath, seeking justice (or revenge) but back with words like “my peace I give to you” and “receive the Holy Spirit.”

The love that allowed Jesus to remove the shroud, to set it aside and walk past the stone and enter our world in peace—that is the love we are given; that it is the love we are called to share, to re-present to the world. *That* is the love where our lives, and the hope of the world, can be found.

Easter is about us. It's about us as individuals, and it's about us as a church. The love of Jesus that brought him out of the tomb, this love is ours by gift. This love calls us to be a forgiving and a caring people, a people who choose not to hide among the dead, but to come out, in peace, to a world that desperately needs the very love it so violently rejects. This love is given to us, that we may reach out our own wounded hands in blessing and in service—and so continue Christ's life, and thereby discover our own.

We know how hard this can be. We all have our caves, we all have our places among the dead, where we hide from life and from each other. We each have our hurts and our wounds and our scars that we wrap up in, and that would keep us apart, and hidden. But Easter rolls away *our* stone, too; and calls us to follow Christ—to rise, and to go out into the light, and so discover the life we are given to live, and the life we are called to share.

We do not do this alone, or through our own strength. We dare not. Instead, we do this because Christ is risen, and is alive in our world, and in us.

Easter is about Jesus; and Easter is about us.

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The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!