

Easter C + 20 April 2025 + Acts 10:34, 37-43 + Col 3:1-4 + Jn 20:1-9

Pope Benedict XVI once said, *“being a Christian essentially means believing in the risen Lord”*. We believe in a risen Savior. This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. In fact, we could even go so far as to say that the reason why Church exists is because Christ has risen from the dead! And our identity as a Catholic Christian should come before any other identity we take unto ourselves. We believe in Jesus Christ, *‘Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead.’*

Throughout all of Lent, we have been walking with the Lord on a journey that would lead definitively to the Cross. On Holy Thursday, we recalled how the Lord models at every moment His life as a servant; above all, how He gives Himself to us in the Holy Eucharist. On Good Friday, we remained at the foot of His Cross with His mother, and witnessed His Kingly reign by the power of His love for us, love even unto death. Last night at the Easter Vigil, we joined with all creation as it waited in silence for Him to rise from the depths, and proclaim His triumph over death! And now this joyful Easter morning, we walk with Mary Magdalen to the tomb, only to find it is empty, the stone has been rolled away!

If we listen closely to the Gospel this morning, we hear that the disciples had no idea what had happened to the body of Jesus. Even though He had told them before His passion that He would rise after 3 days, they didn’t get it. No one, not even Jesus’ closest friends, saw the resurrection coming. It was simply too wonderful to even dare to imagine: that someone could rise from the dead in a glorified body, never to die again. And yet it is true.

In fact, it was all part of the plan. Reflecting on these incredible events, John admits in the Gospel that we just heard that *they (he is including himself here) did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead*. Everything that Jesus did during His life, and even His death, was in perfect obedience to the will of the Father, that is to say, in accordance with the great plan of God that we gradually see unfold through all of the Scriptures, a plan that will culminate with the Resurrection (and Pentecost).

In Luke’s Gospel, Ch. 24 (13-35), we hear how the resurrected Jesus appears to two of His disciples on the Road to Emmaus late on Easter morning, but they don’t recognize Him in His glorified body. So they proceed to tell the Risen Lord that they had heard what they thought was a fanciful tale of an empty tomb and of Jesus being alive. And so the risen Lord has to rebuke them: *O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! He says. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*. It was all part of the plan!

So what exactly is so different about the resurrection that no one saw it coming? Well, the resurrection of Jesus was not just a “resuscitation”, like that of Lazarus. It was not just a matter of Jesus “living on in the hearts of his disciples” as some modern revisionists like to say. It was a real, historical event that was so unexpected, so novel, that nobody believed it even when they saw the empty tomb. No one recognized Jesus in His glorified body, until He spoke in his familiar voice, or until He revealed the holes of his hands and feet, and his pierced side. The resurrected body can be touched, seen, heard, and can even eat, yet is not confined to space and time. It is a body that can walk the earth, and yet be completely with the Father. It is a heavenly, glorified body, the likes of which we can scarcely imagine.

And yet we should try to imagine it. Because the effects of Easter get even better! This resurrected body of Jesus will be the kind of body that we too will have someday—if we believe. The reason why Easter is the greatest celebration for mankind is because Resurrection was not just for Jesus. Jesus not only lived for others, He not only died for others, but He also rose for others—He rose for us! On the Last Day, we who have been Baptized into Him will share in His resurrection. And that hope is the real source of our Easter joy: not just a prolonged earthly life, but eternal life with He who loves us eternally!

This eternal life waits for us, but it already begins now. In Baptism, we have died and risen with Christ to a new life. We are no longer slaves to sin, slaves to ourselves, slaves to the fear of death. If we truly embrace what it means to be Baptized, we must think and live differently. St. Paul says in our 2nd reading today from his letter to the Colossians: *Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* We can’t deceive ourselves into believing that everyone “earns” eternal life simply by being a “nice person.” If that were the case, then the cross was in vain. No, the only way to come to the resurrection of Christ is to live like Christ, for Christ, in Christ. Yes, this means that we will know the weight of His Cross. But the hope of the resurrection allows us to not only endure the crosses of this life, but also to enjoy the blessings of this life in a new way. The hope of resurrection gives meaning, purpose, and direction to this life, because we no longer have to cling to this life as if it is the only thing that there is.

And this is a hope worth sharing. Like St. Peter in our 1st reading today, we are *to preach and testify* to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is now *judge of the living and the dead*. Another reason why our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead rests on a solid foundation is because like St. Peter, most of the eyewitnesses of His resurrection were put to death on account of *their witness*. No one would submit to martyrdom for a myth or a nice idea. One only submits to martyrdom if he knows by faith that this life is only the entrance into eternal life. And so we pray this joyful day that the Lord will help us to be true witnesses: that all that we are and all we do gives witness to the truth, that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and is Lord forever and ever. Amen! Alleluia!