

EASTER – ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD

(6.4.17 – J.F.M.H.)

Christ redeemed mankind and gave perfect Glory to God principally through his paschal mystery. Dying He destroyed our death and rising He restored our life. The resurrection of our Blessed Lord from the grave has been regarded as the central mystery of the Catholic faith. Certainly from apostolic times it has been held to be the pivot round which revolved and on which depended the arguments of Christian theology. For while the death of Christ might be taken to imply that He was in no way different from other men, His triumph over death could have no other meaning than the significant challenge of His claim to unique divinity. To die in defence of one's belief is evidence of sincerity, but it cannot demonstrate the authenticity of that conviction, since men have died for contradictory beliefs. That Christ was sincere cannot be denied; the conclusion that He was therefore divine is also itself paradoxically logical; for one who sincerely believes Himself to be God and dies to prove it, must either be hopelessly insane or really divine. But the final touch is given to the argument, and all the proof rendered irresistible when to it is added the reappearance of the dead Christ, clothed and habited in a human body. The argument became; Our Lord who claimed to be God died to attest the sincerity of His claim, was raised up by His own divine power to life again in testimony to the truth of His doctrine. The author of life and death has therefore added His own witness to the witness of Christ. God has sealed by His power the declaration of His Son. If Christ were not God, God Himself would have been party to the deceit.

Easter is the celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead. It is celebrated on Sunday, and marks the end of Holy Week, the end of Lent, the last day of the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday), and is the beginning of the Easter season of the liturgical year. His resurrection marks the triumph of good over evil, sin and death. It is the singular event that proves that those who trust in God and accept Christ will be raised from the dead. Since Easter represents the fulfilment of God's promises to mankind, it is the most important holiday in the Christian calendar. In the Gospels, the precise details of the Easter narrative vary slightly, but none of these variances are critical to the main story. In fact, it is argued that the variances are simply matters of style and not substance. Despite the variances, the key aspects of the Easter story all match. Above all, they agree that the tomb of Christ was indeed empty, which is the most essential fact. The Catechism of the Catholic Church proclaims, *"We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this day he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus. "The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross: Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; to the dead, he has given life. (C.C.C.638)*

The account of Our Lord's life on earth given in the Gospels is, by and large, a hidden one. It was only in its last three years that He carried out His public Ministry. At the end of that, His death by crucifixion was very public indeed. It was planned by His enemies to be a public spectacle of His humiliation and shame. Even when on the cross He was invited to show His power by saving Himself and the two thieves crucified with Him, by coming down from the cross, but refused to be tempted. He had accepted His death and terrible torture for our sins and for love of us. He was not to be deflected from this. He died and was buried with a large stone covering the entrance of the tomb and guards were placed over it. Nobody was going to be allowed to remove the body. His Resurrection too was a hidden event. Men had to believe in it from the witness of those who saw the empty tomb, and those who saw Him alive during the 40 days he remained on earth before ascending to His Father in heaven.

That glorious event too, was witnessed only by a few. Surely the 40 days He spent on earth after His Resurrection, was a period when His glory would show through to all men,

but this also remains mysteriously hidden. The details of where He was and how He spent the time we know very little. He appeared in a number of different places sometimes to a few, at other times to many. Some fourteen of these apparitions are recorded. Even His appearance seemed to be filled with secrecy and concealment. When He appeared to the two disciples going to Emmaus, He disclosed His identity only as He was vanishing. When He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene she thought he was a gardener. She only knew Him when He used her name. When He appeared at the lake to the disciples in the fishing boat, at first they did not know who it was and when it flashed upon them, they cried, "*It is the Lord.*" This concealment of Himself was so unlike the way sinful man in his pride would behave. However, it was very like the rest of the hidden life of Our Lord. In the Blessed Sacrament we see with our eyes nothing of the glory He has in heaven. We could not bear it if we did. Instead of the worship of sight in His heavenly glory, He chose the worship of faith below on earth. Once again it is a hidden life He has chosen. What love He shows, what an example He continues to provide to all. St. Mark gives an account of what happened when. Mary Magdalen and Mary the Mother of James and Salome, went to anoint Christ's body, "*entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, He is not here; see the place where they laid Him. But go tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He told you. And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid."*" (Mk.16.1, 5-8)

St. John adds another detail. "*She (Mary Magdalene) ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."* Peter then came out with the other disciple. *And they went towards the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that had been on His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and He saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes."* (John 20.2-10)

Every Easter the Church proclaims; "*On the third day He rose again from the dead.*" The Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 638-658 gives an account of Christ's Resurrection and shows its importance. Each of these paragraphs are well worth reading. They show how the Resurrection, Christ's great victory and triumph over sin and death, was so unostentatious. What a contrast to His public and terrible death on the cross, though how very like the way Our Lord chose to be a witness to His Almighty Father for most of His life. We know of the Resurrection only through His Church, and even then only as Christ having risen. The actual Resurrection itself has been depicted by many artists, but the possible witnesses, the soldiers who were sent to guard the tomb, were silent, perhaps silenced is a better description. They took the money offered by the Chief Priest and Elders, who told them to tell people, that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep." However the Resurrection was real. Death could not, and had not severed the Human nature from the Divine Person. The Risen Christ is with His Church still in the Blessed Sacrament. Once again, we remain with free will, and use our faith to accept or reject His presence.

We can confidently proclaim, "The Lord is truly raised, alleluia. To Him be glory and power for all the ages of eternity, alleluia, alleluia." (Entrance Antiphon for Easter Sunday)

"We pray that we will share the joy of Christ's resurrection with everyone. Lord hear our prayer."

