

JESUS IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD

by Fr. Tim Church

There are a number of curiosities about the Resurrection of Jesus and his appearances to the disciples. During this season we will hear them all in the Gospel readings for the fifty days of Easter. We will apply them to many aspects of our life. The Resurrection is so astonishing that we want very much to see it as the description of our life. "Even though times are rough, good times will follow, just like the Resurrection that follows the cross." The first Christians certainly saw things similarly. They went through many hardships and persecutions all the time clinging to faith in the Resurrection of Jesus:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 1

Corinthians 1:22-25

Now these trials and sufferings of everyday life or even those of an extraordinary degree are received by us in a variety of ways. We may see them as unfortunate accidents, the result of evil acts or even as punishments. In all of them the promise of the Resurrection is seen as their removal, freedom from tribulation. We describe Jesus' Resurrection in exactly this way:

*The strife is o'er, the battle done;
The victory of life is won;
The song of triumph has begun: Alleluia!*

It is a like a war that ends in victory and there is a return to peace. This is certainly enough of a reason to celebrate. The sadness of the disciples is turned to a joy that is so surprising that it is hard for them to grasp, hard for them to believe.

"They were still incredulous for joy and were amazed..."

Luke 24:41

One of the common Christian beliefs is in this Resurrection. It is understood to be the very center of the Christian religion. Even more, it is held that everything that Christians believe is in fact hinged on the Resurrection. If this did not happen, then what we believe is in vain.

"And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith."

1 Corinthians 15:14

There is, however, a caution that it is order. We can see how it is possible to disconnect the belief in the Resurrection from the person of Jesus Christ. It becomes a sort of mythical maxim to guide us through troubles, much like saying "every cloud has a silver lining". This may seem foolish to even imagine that

this is possible, to move our focus away from the Risen Christ. It is certainly the result of deception that this should happen, but it has a motive. It is much easier to claim control over a maxim or a myth than it is over a person. And a person raised from the dead is even more difficult to dismiss.

The Resurrection is the key event not because that is all that Christianity is about. It is because once this has been established to be true all else falls into place. Everything else that is taught by Christ through the Church is also true. We can put it another way, if you would like. If this Resurrection took place, then what are we to do? This is exactly the question asked at the conclusion of the first Christian homily, given by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. *"What are we to do, my brothers?" Acts 2:37*

Perhaps to a certain degree we spend the rest of our lives asking that question. The Cross that is the instrument of our redemption has become imprinted on our soul, on our every thought. The knowledge that tribulation, personal troubles, physical sufferings are indeed not the end, but can be transformed into a gift to the one who was raised from the dead, becomes the hallmark of our life. We are the people whose lives are defined by the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Not only does all of human history revolve around this event, but our whole lives do as well.

In fact, the power of the Resurrection is not merely in the fact that we are offered eternal life as the reward for living according to Christ's teachings. The joy comes because it is Jesus whom we love that is alive. This is the motive for the unbelievable joy that the disciples experience. It is not just that "someone" has been resurrected. It is that it is Jesus. He is the one who taught justice and mercy, fidelity to the truth and forgiveness, care of the poor and lavish sacrifices for the worship of God, the acceptance of suffering and miraculous healing, obedience to the law of God and the priority of consideration for the needy. It is the Jesus who looked into their hearts and found something valuable that has defeated death. It is the Jesus who saved their lives that is indeed alive again. It is the Jesus who loved them completely that is Risen from the Dead.