

**THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD**

Text: St. Mark 16:1-8

*Alleluia! CHRIST is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As incredible as it may seem, the resurrection of JESUS came as a complete surprise to His disciples. Incredible, because even though JESUS told them many times over preceding days what was about to happen many times over the preceding days, His warnings about the events of Holy Week and His death on Good Friday seemed to escape them. Incredible, because they, themselves, had confessed JESUS as the CHRIST, the SON of God and therefore, God's promised MESSIAH.

The women, too, seem to have been dumbfounded by the unwinding of the events that seemed to come out of nowhere and take on a life of their own.

It had been only seven short days before, when Mary Magdalene and the other women had, with JESUS and His disciples, entered the holy city of Jerusalem, rejoicing with the multitudes and singing great shouts of praise to JESUS, proclaiming Him to be the SON of David. Mary and the others entered Jerusalem with the Man they had confessed to be the MESSIAH. That means they believed JESUS to be God's chosen One who was to be anointed King in order to save God's people. They all had witnessed the jubilation of the people and the songs of the children. I am sure they could not help themselves but joined in with the singing of the alleluias to their King.

It probably seemed to all who followed JESUS that great things were about to happen—as indeed they were—but not quite what they expected. In fact, on their journey to the LORD's tomb early the morning of the third day, Mary Magdalene and the others were probably wondering how something that had started out so right, could have so quickly gone so tragically wrong.

It was little more than five days after His triumphant entry into God's holy city (or six by Jewish reckoning) that JESUS had been arrested, tried, brutally beaten, and condemned, and a cruel sentence of death by crucifixion carried out. JESUS, the Man hailed by the crowds on the previous Sunday was betrayed and cruelly murdered—dead and gone—by Friday evening. Yes, JESUS, whom they expected to be their king, had been crucified, dead, and buried.

So no, I am sure that what Mary and those with her expected in the coolness of that early morning was not what they experienced. They expected to be confronted with the unspeakable reality of JESUS' death; what they experienced was the indescribable joy of JESUS' triumphant resurrection.

What is surprising, however, is that Mary and the women who accompanied her to the tomb would, that early morning, expect anything else, even though JESUS Himself had told them what to expect many times before. Indeed, the Gospels of Sts. Matthew, Luke, and Mark each record no less than three occasions when JESUS warned His disciples and those who traveled with Him of what was to come to pass. In the Gospel recorded by St. John, JESUS even predicts His death by a crucifixion.

Yet, even with these warnings and teachings, even though they believed JESUS to be “*the CHRIST, the SON of the Living God,*” even though they were witness to His miraculous power, they did not understand what all this meant. They doubted, and when JESUS was crucified, they lost all hope. Perhaps it was all just an empty dream and Jesus was nothing more than a man after all.

But when the angels greeted Mary and the other women who had come to the empty tomb, they gave voice to that truth upon which our hope of Heaven is founded. For as St. Paul recorded in his first Epistle to the Christian congregation in Corinth: “*If in this life only we have hope in CHRIST, we are of all men the most pitiable.*”

As Christians we know that if JESUS did not really rise our faith in Him would be in vain. But we are assured that our hope is grounded in more than this. For Paul’s Epistle goes on to say: “*But now CHRIST is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST all shall be made alive.*”

The devil, who is the father of lies, would have us believe, indeed, he has convinced most of the world, (and sadly in some cases, even those that call themselves Christian), that this resurrection story is not true. Satan has told the world that the disciples must have stolen the Body from the tomb. After all, everyone with any sense knows that the dead do not rise. But the fact is that the eleven disciples did not steal JESUS’ Body.

As the Gospel narratives freely admit, the disciples were afraid to come out of hiding. It was the women and not the disciples who were the first to go to the tomb. The disciples did not have the courage necessary to confront the guards at the grave, nor to break the seal on the entrance of the tomb. So no, the disciples did not steal the Body of JESUS and then spend the rest of their lives promoting and perpetuating a lie. No one would die, as, according to the tradition of the Church, ten of the disciples later did, and in the most gruesome of ways, defending a hoax. Who, in their right mind, would be willing to die a grisly death to defend a myth? The truth remains: **CHRIST is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Yes, Satan has tried to pass on the lie that JESUS did not rise from the dead. But where he has been unsuccessful with this lie, he has tried to minimize the true reason for the celebration of Easter.

In the world, JESUS' resurrection is pushed aside in favor of the ridiculous. Often the empty tomb is relegated to the back seat in an Easter celebration of feasting and friends, hard-boiled eggs, chocolate chicks, and Peter Cottontail hopping down his bunny trail. By themselves, these things are innocuous and harmless, but when they replace Christ's empty tomb, when they become our focus, Satan has won.

So rather than a celebration of the life God gives, Easter has become in most quarters, nothing more than the informal welcoming of spring. Which, by the way, has been a charge of unbelievers against Christianity for nearly two millennia, who charge that Easter has its roots in the pagan celebration of the annual new birth or awakening of the earth after a long winter's sleep. Rather than a chance to point to the empty tomb and burial cloths of CHRIST, Easter becomes a chance to don our Easter bonnets so we can be the grandest people in the Easter parade. Instead of celebrating the most holy feast on the Church calendar, many of us act more like the pagans and unbelievers in the world around us.

Yes, the devil has tried to minimize the empty tomb, and with many in the world he has succeeded. As St. Paul writes: *"But the natural man does not receive the things of the SPIRIT of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* But not so with you. For you know the truth: **CHRIST is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Yes, you know the truth, but was there anything in you that caused you to believe this truth? The answer is no. That is, the answer is no in the sense that your Old Adam, your old sinful flesh, cannot, alone, spiritually discern anything. On its own this corrupted flesh has no knowledge of who God is, and what is more, it does not even desire to do so. But the answer is also yes. That is, the answer is yes in the sense that through the means of grace—God's Holy Word and the blessed Sacraments—God calls and enlightens you and with His HOLY SPIRIT, dwells within you. It is by the grace of God through the indwelling of the HOLY SPIRIT alone that you believe.

The women, who come with great sadness to confirm JESUS' death, become—with great joy—the first witnesses to His resurrection. The response of the faithful women at seeing CHRIST sets forth the proper response to our risen LORD—worship. It is in this worship that this Servant King comes to us with His life-giving gifts. Here in the worship of our risen SAVIOR, a great exchange takes place. JESUS CHRIST brings to us, through the liturgy of the Church, the treasure He won for us through His bloody sacrifice of Good Friday. He gives to us that which we could not gain for ourselves: salvation, reconciliation, and peace with our God.

JESUS obeyed God's law perfectly when you or I could not. He pleased His heavenly FATHER when you or I could not. He suffered the punishment for our sins that you or I could not have carried. JESUS died for you and me. Where we were unable to go, JESUS took our place. When we should have died, He died instead upon the Cross of Calvary. Through JESUS we can say, *"Look at the Book of Life. We have died with CHRIST and are raised with Him to new life. The devil has no claim on us."*

When the father of lies tries to accuse us on Judgment Day, God will say, *“Through a Substitute, this man, this woman, this child, has died to sin. Satan and the Law have no claim anymore.”* This is what JESUS has won for us and gives to us when we meet Him here in this holy house. In return we give the only thing we can give; our thanks and praise, our alleluias and amens. We acknowledge the truth: **CHRIST is risen! He has risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Therefore, we no longer need fear the grave. We no longer need approach the tomb with sorrow and trepidation. With Mary Magdalene in the garden that first Easter dawn, we grasp the feet of our SAVIOR. For He swallowed *“up death forever, And the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth.”*

Our LORD’s return at the end of time will be heralded by trumpets; music which will signal the last day has come. Here at *“His resurrection is the first and decisive blast of God’s great final music. That final music cannot cease because the score is written by God, and He writes no unfinished symphonies. As surely as Adam once set a fatal deathward cadence for mankind and made all human life a march of death, so surely has CHRIST reversed that cadence and made it music that shall surge inevitably upward to eternal life.”* (Martin Franzmann, Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets. St. Louis, CPH, 1966, p. 67.)

So with Isaiah we declare with joy and thanksgiving: *“Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”*

This is the meaning and message of Easter. Death is dead and life lives! **Alleluia! CHRIST is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.

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