

**THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD / EASTER DAY**

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.

Yesterday, I took the opportunity to again watch the Mel Gibson movie, “*THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*.” To meditate on Our LORD’s suffering is a good and noble thing. But it strikes me that proper and helpful meditation of the LORD’s passion is far too often misunderstood.

But how? How can meditation on the suffering of our LORD ever be improper and therefore unhelpful for the strengthening of our faith and the understanding of our salvation in CHRIST?

And that brings up another question. For what reason have we so joyfully gathered together this morning? Certainly, we have not come to pour oil and spices over a dead body, as did the women who traveled to JESUS’ tomb early that first Easter morning. Or have we? I feel obligated to remind you that there is a reason we call the Friday just past “*Good Friday*.”

If we do not guard our hearts as we ponder the suffering of our LORD we can quickly be turned inward. Let me give you a couple of examples.

During Passion Week, in many Christian congregations from various denominations all around the world, the Church of CHRIST remembers the events of that week with reenactments of our LORD’s last days upon this earth—from Palm Sunday parades, to foot washing and Seder meals on Maundy Thursday, even up to, and including, our LORD’s suffering and death upon the cross on Good Friday.

So, in many locations like the Philippine Islands and Mexico, they beat their flesh with whips (called flagellum) until they are a bloody mess, and in others, they actually nail men to crosses to reenact CHRIST’s suffering and death in a twisted effort to show the world and GOD the depth of their piety in a vain attempt to merit GOD’s forgiveness.

Yet, for all their piety, those who believe such things merit forgiveness are mistaken; their faith is misplaced and for this they must repent. They are mistaken because their desire has already been fulfilled and the empty tomb of Easter dawn is proof positive that all the work of our LORD for our salvation is completely accomplished. “*It is finished*” even as JESUS said.

We Christians should not dwell in the past, but live in the ever-present reality of the eternal day of our LORD. The death of JESUS on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday are not simply days on the calendar of human history long past. They are days whose

events transcend all time, reaching farther back than the very first day of creation, and forward even beyond the Day of our LORD's triumphant return on the clouds of Heaven.

For this reason, it is proper to say that every day in the life of a Christian is Good Friday *and* Easter. You see, we are Good Friday *and* Easter people who, by faith in the all-atoning Sacrifice of CHRIST upon the Cross to save us, live every day in the gracious mercy of our GOD who has given us a share in His victorious resurrection.

Therefore, we Christians celebrate Good Friday and Easter, not as the ancient Hebrews and their Jewish descendants celebrate Passover. Good Friday and Easter are not annual requirements observed only once a year, nor are they celebrated simply as memorials through which we remember our redemption and its cost. For the Christian, every day is a small Easter because every day we reap the benefits of Good Friday. They are, therefore, ever-present realities in the life of GOD's Church and her people—realities lived out in the here and now in our risen LORD, JESUS CHRIST.

Nor is our celebration simply a passion play performed to get the players and audience closer to JESUS. We need no such prompts or crutches, for we are alive in CHRIST and He in us. This life became a reality in your Baptism on the day you were buried into death with JESUS that you be raised again with Him to newness of life in His resurrection. We Christians celebrate Good Friday *and* Easter every LORD's Day as we hear GOD's Word, pray in JESUS's Name, and eat and drink His sacrificed Body and Blood.

This is how we Christians can face the pain of this life. For all the pain experienced in this vale of tears, for war, famine, disease, earthquake, hurricane, fire, and flood, even for temporal death and the cold dark grave, believers in CHRIST JESUS sing the song of everlasting life. We sing because we know that we are nothing more than strangers here. We know that all we experience here, gold or dross, wealth or poverty, good or bad, is only temporary; Heaven is our home.

So we sing. We tell all the earth what JESUS has done. We would have all the world know what GOD has accomplished in CHRIST for the whole of creation. We sing, we confess, we celebrate, and yes, we remember. We remember, but not for the reason of conjuring up saccharine-sweet emotions, not for tears, not to feel closer to JESUS, but in remembrance of Him who died and yet lives. We remember that because He lives, so too, do we.

We remember what His sacrifice means to our here and now—that we are redeemed, forgiven, and made holy—that because JESUS died we live, now and forever—that because JESUS died conquering Satan and sin, because JESUS rose again on the third day conquering death and the grave, Satan no longer can accuse us, sin no longer holds sway over us, and death has lost its sting—the grave its victory. *“O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”* They are swallowed up in the death and resurrection of our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

For this reason, we Christians sing because we no longer need fear the grave. We no longer need approach the tomb with sorrow or foreboding. Death has lost its power for *“Death is swallowed up in victory.”* We sing because JESUS’ death and resurrection have defeated death forever. We sing because death is dead, and life lives!

Thus, the tomb we witness this day is not the tomb we left behind on Good Friday. That tomb preached sin, death, and despair. It held the broken, bruised, and bloodied Body of a broken Man—a dead Man. Today, that tomb proclaims life. The guards are gone, the stone is rolled away, the Body is gone, and instead of death, a young man clothed in white garments, whose face glows with the brilliance of heaven, is there to greet us.

The tomb of Good Friday preached an indictment against a fallen world, a world in which every intent and thought of the heart of men was only for evil. Today, it preaches Light and Life and freedom for the captives. This messenger from Heaven now brings a message of eternal life. What is that message? *“Do not be alarmed. You seek JESUS of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.”* Therefore, I ask you, *“What became of mold and decay?”*

Our LORD JESUS is not found in the grave; He is not there. He has gone before us to prepare our final home where we shall one day follow Him and live with Him forever. If it were not so, He would have told us. So no, we do not wait for JESUS to fulfill all things. That He has already done. Remember, *“It is finished.”* Now we patiently await our LORD’s return.

That Day, the Day of our LORD’s return at the end of time will be heralded by trumpets; glorious divine music which will signal the last day has finally arrived. JESUS’, *“...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.)

This is the meaning and message of Good Friday **and** Easter. Death is dead and life lives! CHRIST is risen! He is risen, indeed; and the Risen CHRIST says to you, *“I forgive you all your sins.”* Alleluia! Amen!

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

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