Easter Monday

Holy Communion

Holy Trinity Utrecht, 4 April 2021 AD

Colossians 3:1-7St John 20:1-10

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*

***The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

Today, we proclaim that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead!

**What is the Resurrection?**

Mary Magdalene first saw the empty tomb, and could not believe it until our Lord called her name. When she told the disciples, John and Peter ran to the tomb early that first morning… John says it was only when he *saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself*, only *then* that the hope they were supposed to have had in the Resurrection was finally ignited into a flame.

Every little detail of those first moments was important to the Apostles because it was all so strange. “That very day” as we heard in today’s Gospel (St Luke 24:13-35), Jesus was seen but not recognized on the road to Emmaus. Later that same day Jesus appeared to the disciples suddenly in a locked room and said, “*Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”* He asked for a piece of fish and ate it before them. He had Thomas touch his wounds when he appeared suddenly to the disciples the following week. Resurrection “is not survival [after death] but transformation.” [Robert Crouse] Jesus had a body more substantial than ours but was not bound by earthly limitations of matter – he appeared and disappeared easily, could choose to be recognized or not to be recognized.

The witness of the Apostles is that Jesus rose from the dead in a *bodily* resurrection. And Matthew writes that after Jesus rose from the dead, *many bodies* – not *many spirits* – but *many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.* [Mt 27:52-53] Jesus’ resurrection is not for him alone but is what *each one of us* can expect and hope for, as His followers, in the general Resurrection at the Last Day.

**How is this related to the Cross of Christ?**

On Palm Sunday I mentioned that in the ancient Church the two events – Jesus’ passion and death and His resurrection – were remembered until about the fourth century as one single celebration on the same day. We have opened it out to view it as through a prism in all its colour – but we can be confused if we no longer attend a Good Friday service but only the Easter celebration.

How are the two actions – the passion and death of Jesus and His resurrection linked?

On Good Friday I mentioned that sin is not simply about a juridical act, somehow external to who we really are – you broke this law, so you are guilty, Christ takes away your sin, so you are to rejoice. It is logical and true, but it is not efficacious in us, if it is just some sort of rational equation in our mind without radically affecting our life. Faith without a real transformation is not true faith. Sin is pointed out to us by God because it degrades us and others. It makes us less than we are meant to be. The experience of sin in us is a trajectory towards non-being, towards our annihilation, our death – it is something deeply uncomfortable, even terrifying. And we feel shame and try to cover it over with a mask (an outward persona) as if it had no effect on us – but unless it is dealt with it works our ruin. God wants the opposite for us, God wants us to become *more* not *less* of who we are meant to be. To become fully the image and likeness of God, as that is manifested in all its splendour and in all its variety in the lives of His saints. Sin is pointed out to us, Christ came to save us from it, so that we stop destroying ourselves.

Jesus came to capture us from that movement towards non-being, towards death, and recall us to our true end – eternal life in God. And the true end of each of us is a bodily Resurrection – the full integrity of our being. It is a transformation in the last day, but the reality and promise of the Resurrection of the body begins in this life – we can have a taste of it now, daily. For us, spirit and flesh are often opposed to one another now – but in the Resurrection, as one preacher has described it, “the strife of spirit and flesh is ended and the body becomes the clear and translucent expression of spirit.” [from a Sermon by Fr Robert Crouse]

How does this promise of the Resurrection happen *in* us daily?

Jesus put aside His divinity to take flesh and dwell among us – Paul describes it as a self-emptying. He further self-empties, by becoming a servant of us – as shown on the night he was betrayed – when he put off his garments, girded himself with a towel, and washed the disciples feet – so wonderfully spoken of by Marieke on Maundy Thursday. That self-emptying continued further – when he entered in His Passion, in silence, and into the depths of our excruciating experience of shame and being shamed, to meet us there. And he further emptied himself to taste of the death that we taste of through sin.

In the midst of our experience of self annihilation and death, Jesus comes to assure us this is not our trajectory, but he brings us up out of that grave – he points our eyes up towards being and towards fulness of being – Jesus says, *I came that [my sheep] may have life and have it abundantly*. [John 10:10]

He says, you don’t need to hide from that of which you are ashamed, it is forgiven. Turn away from it, and turn to me, take off the mask and be real – Come, and I will refresh you. The love and mercy I show to you, now show to others.

Our Ancient Easter Collect may seem a little mild and unrelated to the glory of Christ’s Resurrection, but it is at the heart of the beginnings of that new Resurrection life *in* us. The centre of the prayer is this: *We humbly beseech you, that as by your special grace you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring the same to good effect.* This is the experience of Resurrection pressing upon us in this life: Grace is falling upon all humanity continually like a gentle rain, but we need grace to respond to it, to take it up in our very being, as we act upon every good desire. And when we do – speaking the truth, putting away fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness – we become more human, more alive, we experience life more abundantly – it becomes embodied – actually new neural networks are formed in our minds, the path of holiness becomes imprinted in us – and the desires of our bodies, and our emotional lives, become more and more aligned with those of Christ.

And this is the beginning of a transformation that involves all of who we are body and soul – a transformation beyond all explanation. St John says, “we know not what we shall be, but we shall be like him” [1 John 3:2]. St Paul concurs, “for our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body. [Philip. 3:20-21] [from a sermon by Fr Crouse]

Resurrection begins when we turn to look up and begin to act upon the grace being showered upon us from above. James says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights …. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”* [James 1:17-18]

*We have died*, as Paul says this morning, *and our life is hidden with Christ in God*. *We have died* to the worlds ways of perceiving what life is and how we can attain its fulness. And our life is *hidden with Christ*, in the sense that the world can’t see the life we are participating in and being drawn up by – though some will catch glimpses of it in *us* and begin to desire it. We are held now in that embrace of God – experiencing His grace and responding to it gladly – and His promises are far beyond what we could ever have imagined for ourselves. Life, and that abundantly. Resurrection now, and even to eternal life – soul and body!

Let us conclude this day with poetry, with the words of the Easter sermon of St Chrysostom from the 4th Century and repeated through the ages:

*Is there anyone who is a devout lover of God?    
Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival!    
Is there anyone who is a grateful servant?    
Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord!  …*

*You that have kept the fast, and you that have not,    
rejoice today for the Table is richly laden!    
Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one.    
Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the [Bread of life].    
Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!*

*Let no one grieve at his poverty,    
for the universal kingdom has been revealed.    
Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again;    
for forgiveness has risen from the grave.    
Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free.    
He has destroyed it by enduring it.*

*He destroyed Hades when He descended into it.    
He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh.    
Isaiah foretold this when he said,    
"You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."*

*Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with.    
…*

*Hell took a body, and discovered God.    
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.    
It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.    
O death, where is thy sting?    
O Hades, where is thy victory?*

*Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated!    
Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!    
Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!    
Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!    
Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;    
for Christ having risen from the dead,    
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

*To Him be all Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!*