

Sunday, March 27
Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day

Luke 24:1-12

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Dear disciples of the Risen Lord.

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Easter is not the time to engage with debates on what actually happened in the garden or to provide an apology for bodily resurrection. Resurrection is a matter of faith, neither proven nor arrived at through rational argument. At Easter, we proclaim the flourishing life that God offers to all creation through Christ's death and resurrection. Easter provides the opportunity to flesh out, so to speak, the implications of resurrection for all the places of death that our hearers must live in. ¹

When we follow the events of Holy Week we find that they take place in concrete places like Gethsemane, Golgotha, the high priest's courtyard, Pilate's headquarters, the burial garden and others. The evangelist named the Calvary, the courtyards, and the judgment halls in the lives of the hearers to show the historicity of the narrative. Even more importantly, the evangelist named the specific place of the resurrection. Even though the hard places have not disappeared, they look very different in the light of the resurrection morning.

The exiled Guatemalan poet, Julia Esquivel wrote about Easter like no other poet I have read.² She wrote during the 30 years in which Guatemala suffered unspeakable political violence. She wrote during the time when many thousands of Maya, Quichez and other indigenous groups were savagely murdered. Hundreds of villages were literally wiped off the face of the earth.

¹ Sundays and Seasons. Easter Theological reflection. Sundaysandseasons.com

² Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality. *Nos han amenazado de Resurrección.*

Julia emerged as a voice for peaceful nonviolent resistance and used her pen to tell the world about the immense suffering her people endured. Sharing the final portion of her most famous poem, *Threatened With Resurrection*, very appropriate:

*...There is something here within us
Which doesn't let us sleep, which doesn't let us rest,
Which doesn't stop pounding deep inside,
In every waking...*

*What keeps us from sleeping,
Is that they have threatened us with resurrection!
Because at each nightfall,
Though exhausted from the endless inventory
Of killings since 1954,
Yet we continue to love life,
And do not accept their death!*

*...Because in this marathon of Hope,
there are always others to relieve us
in bearing the courage necessary
to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death...*

*Accompany us then on this vigil
And you will know what it is to dream!
You will then know how marvelous it is
To live threatened with resurrection!
To dream awake,
To keep watch asleep
To live while dying
And to already know oneself resurrected!*

If death is a terrible event that takes place in history, also Jesus' resurrection is an event that shakes history and creates a new presence that is powerful and sublime. Resurrection brings life where we only have seen death for many years.

Like in the poem of the Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel, the evil around us can create death and desolation, but the Easter morning message is a message of new creation in Christ. Resurrection emerges from the grave of death and pain and proclaims that the last word is pronounced by the God of life, and that word is "I am the resurrection and the life!"

In the same way that Julia Esquivel's poem is a voice of resurrection rising from the ashes of the victims murdered by the oppressive regime in Guatemala, the gospel today is the voice of resurrection coming from an empty tomb proclaiming that the one who was crucified by the Romans has been risen by God who shows through the resurrection the justification and legitimacy of Jesus' ministry and life.

That is why Easter is the central feast of the liturgical year, honored as the greatest of all festivals, celebrated as the Queen of Feasts. One of the most striking aspects of the celebration of Easter is the joyful response of the nature to the resurrection, answering by hiding of its face at the dreadful events of Good Friday. Now at Easter the whole created world is involved in expressing its joy.³

Luther said: "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf of spring time."

3 Journey into the Heart of God. Philip Phatteicher. Pp. 226-227

Nature bears its testimony to the risen life. It is as if the world is new-born, and it eloquently contributes to the praise. Some of the testimony of the natural world is silent-the lengthening of daylight, the increasing warmth of the sun, the appearing of flowers. Other testimony is audible- the song of birds, the flowing of water, the energy of awakening life in bees and animals. As Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) said in his Easter homily:

Everything contributes to the beauty and joy of the feast. The queen of the seasons (Spring) prepares a feast for the queen of days (Easter), and presents to her all the beautiful and delightful things she possesses.⁴

The great hymns of Easter also describe how the natural world rejoices in the resurrection, we can see this reading Hymn ELW 394 *Hail Thee, Festival Day!*

*Hail thee, festival day! Blest day to be hallowed forever;
day when our Lord was raised, breaking the kingdom of death.*

*1 All the fair beauty of earth from the death of the winter arising!
Ev'ry good gift of the year now with its master returns.*

*2 Rise from the grave now, O Lord, the author of life and creation.
Treading the pathway of death, new life you give to us all.*

The lyrics of this hymn by Venantius Fortunatus are from circa 540 AD. They describe clearly the image that the whole creation is participating in the celebration of the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus takes us to the limits of our understanding and reasoning, it makes us enter a new perception of the world. The resurrection invites us to contemplate the world, the nature, the sounds, the flowers, the animals, the water the wind, the earth and the sky as witnesses together with us to new life that the resurrection brought as a gift to enjoy.

⁴ Idem p. 227

The power of the resurrection is the power of life's victory over the more radical of the experiences: death.

The Gospel says that the resurrection took place in a garden. This is a great way to introduce the meaning of the new creation. Because the original creation was crowned with the splendor of the garden of Eden, now the new creation is taking place in another garden. The tomb in the garden is empty. The power of death that entered the garden of Eden is now destroyed by the power of life that rose Jesus. The tomb in the garden is empty. The new Eden is now beginning to experience the beginning of the new creation. There is a new garden of Eden, the garden where the resurrection took place, there is a new creation growing and it is now present in the newness of the Church and the newborn Christian people. We are new people, planted in a new garden of Eden, thanks to the power of the new creation in Christ the resurrection morning.

We are resurrected people!

The whole creation unites us in this experience of life flourishing again. Obviously today we can see that we still having obscurity and death, pain and sorrow, disease and war, brokenness and hate on earth, but all that power could not keep the Lord in the tomb and neither would keep us far from the experience of the joy of a new beginning.

The Roman empire is not anymore, Pilate and Caiaphas are not anymore in power, only the cross is empty and also the tomb. God and not the rulers of the world had the last word. And the last word of God was the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection!

We are resurrected people! We celebrate Jesus' resurrection today and our own resurrection in Jesus. We are alive in him. We are united in a new creation; we are the ones that experience the new Eden every day because God is walking bringing fresh air to our daily journey.

Poverty, hate, war, crime, injustice, violence, illness, are real threats to us, but they lost the battle against Jesus. Jesus overcame the powers of the world and the cross, Jesus is victorious, and we are victorious in him.

The world brings death to us, but God answers that threat with resurrection!

We are resurrected people! We should live and walk as resurrected people! We should celebrate our resurrection today and every day! We united to the whole creation, can proclaim in the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans (8, 35ss):

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For this reason, dear disciples of the risen Lord, we are witnesses to all that Christ has done. Our lives and communities are places that live joyfully in this new creation, in this new day that God has made. The cross, the tree of death has become the tree of life!

Lift up your hearts to the Lord and celebrate contemplating the victory day of our Saviour. Celebrate that God has declared Jesus as Lord and that Jesus message was confirmed in the Easter morning.

And this powerful message of hope and joy that now is here is the source of our identity and the message that we need to announce in words and deeds.

We are here contemplating the resurrection garden and the empty tomb, and our mission is to expand the new garden of life by preaching the gospel in Word and Sacrament, like today that we will be receiving three new disciples into the family of God through baptism. Today the new creation is reaching more people and we rejoice for that.

The resurrected people of God is commissioned by the risen Lord to be the witnesses of his resurrection living the resurrection every day. Do not be afraid or worried of fall in the temptation of anxiety. We are free, we are resurrected people, we can now enjoy our days here and our life in eternity.

Life is real and life has the last word.

Happy Easter. Feliz Pascua!

He is risen! He is risen indeed!