

**APRIL 1, 2018**

**Easter Sunday - The Resurrection of the Lord - The Mass of Easter Day**

**Reading 1** [ACTS 10:34A, 37-43](#)

**Responsorial Psalm** [PS 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23.](#)

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R. (24) **This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad**

**Reading 2** | [COR 5:6B-8](#)

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**Gospel** [JN 20:1-9](#)

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On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

**HOMILY:**

**The story is told of a funeral service** that was being held in a church for a woman who, after over 40 years of marriage, had passed away. At the end of the service, the pallbearers carrying the casket accidentally bumped into a wall, jarring the casket. To their surprise, at that moment they heard a faint moan. They opened the casket to find that the woman was actually alive! That's a surprise! Well, she lived for 10 more years and then died, really this time. A funeral was again held at the same church and at the end the pallbearers were again carrying the casket out. As they are walking, the husband called out, "Watch out for the wall!"

**Really, Father, is that an appropriate story for a homily, especially on this most sacred of all celebrations, Easter?** It might be more appropriate than first seems . . .

For, our sisters and brothers in the Greek Orthodox have the tradition, the day after Easter, was of telling jokes. It's like their "April Fool's Day." They felt they were imitating the cosmic joke that God pulled on Satan, the prince of death, in the Resurrection. In Jesus' death, Satan thought he had won, and was smug in his victory, smiling to himself, thinking he had the last word on life and death. So he thought! Then God raised Jesus from the dead and life and salvation became the final words. What a marvelous trick Jesus has played on that smug prince of death—Jesus lives, and we live!

This is precisely the sense that St. Gregory of Nyssa developed in one of his Easter sermons, called "Three-Day Period of the Resurrection of Christ." In this homily, St. Gregory poses the question of why Christ spent three days "in the heart of the earth." This period was necessary and sufficient, he argues, for Christ to "expose the foolishness" (*moranoi*) of the devil, i.e, to outwit, ridicule and deceive him. How did Christ manage to "outwit" the devil? Gregory gives the following reply to this question:

“As the ruler of darkness could not approach the presence of the Light unimpeded, had he not seen in Him something of flesh, then, as soon as he saw the God-bearing flesh and saw the miracle performed through it by the Deity, he hoped that if he came to take hold of the flesh through death, then he would take hold of all the power contained in it. Therefore, having swallowed the bait of the flesh, he was pierced by the hook of the Deity and thus the dragon was transfixed by the hook.”

He took the bait, that foolish prince of death, and bit off far-far more than he could ever chew! Death’s power had been fooled!

Some question the place of humor in the Christian faith, wondering how appropriate it is to laugh when we’re dealing with such serious things! Yet, for me, humor speaks of hope—to laugh at trials speaks of a confidence that the trials don’t have the final word. And to laugh on Easter is laughter of relief and joy—that death has been defeated and we are relieved and filled with joy.

Easter is, of course, our celebration of eternal life, something our faith teaches us is not to be seen as “interminable” but rather the fullness of life. When does life seem to be more at its fullest than when we’re with friends, laughing enjoying each other, rejoicing, laughing? Easter is about the fullness of life, so let’s enjoy laugh, at the devil’s expense! Just when death thought it had defeated us, our lives were snatched from its grasp by the resurrection of Jesus. Our reaction—relief, the deepest of joy—laughing with joy!

I’m wondering what the moment will be like when, after death, we see our Lord face to face, the one who gives us eternal life. We’ve been worrying, fearing, doubting about eternal life. We’ve worried about our loved ones who have died. And when in heaven we see eternal, full life, I think we’ll react in laughter: Laughter that is relief; laughter that sees how ridiculous were our fears; laughter, that always characterizes the fullness of life! I think we’ll laugh with joy at the exuberance of the complete, total love of God, in eternal life.

So, today, let’s gather with family, friends, and have a laugh! Or, let’s just chuckle to ourselves! In doing so, we laugh at the feeble efforts of the devil and death and rejoice in indescribable joy that Christ is risen and so is our certain hope of eternal, full life. The final word on living and dying: the Resurrection. So, today, we find the marvelous convergence of April Fool’s Day and Easter, both of which have a place for jokes. For we remember the great joke that was played on death when Jesus gave himself to the cross and brought life out of that most stubborn enemy of ours. Any victory Death has is only temporary. To that, we say, “Hah!”

The comedian George Burns once said: “The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible. Hopefully I’ve not gone on too long—but just long enough to wish you and your loved ones a Happy Easter.