

Homily Resources for Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20:1-9

1. Introduction: Significance of Easter: Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Church for three reasons.

1) The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the greatest of the miracles, proving that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your faith is in vain”* (1 Cor 15: 14). *“Jesus is Lord, he is risen”* (Rom 10: 9), was the central theme of the *kerygma* (or 'preaching'), of the apostles because Jesus prophesied it as a sign of his divinity: *“Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again”* (Jn 2: 19). The founder of no other religion has an empty tomb as Jesus has.

2) Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: *“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies”* (Jn 11: 25-26).

3) Easter is a feast which gives us hope, encouragement and courage in this world of pain, sorrows, tears and conflict. It is our belief in the real presence of the risen Jesus that gives meaning to our personal as well as our communal prayer, strength to fight against temptations, evil, and corruption, and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears.

2. Summary: The Resurrection of Jesus is a miracle of God by which the ordinary powers of nature were overcome and Jesus Christ rose (by his own power) from death on the third day in a glorious body with special properties. This is important to us because the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the reality that we who are related to him by faith and baptism can expect to participate in the same kind of resurrection to eternal life.

3. Basic points concerning the resurrection of Jesus are the following.

1. Actual historical event. It was an actual historical event in which Jesus rose from the dead, left the tomb in which he had been buried, and appeared to many people including the disciples in the 40 days before his Ascension. It was not a psychologically created idea hatched by Jesus's devastated disciples in order to meet their psychological needs.

2. It was not the same kind of event as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus raised several people from the dead. That was to an earthly life. All of them later died a natural death.

3. Two types of witnesses, proofs for the Resurrection: One – **the empty tomb.** Two – **the appearances of Jesus** to various groups of persons. This second witness, the appearances of Jesus, is demonstrated in the first reading by Peter's testimony. Peter is probably thinking of the list St Paul mentions in 1 Cor 15:5-6 identifying those to whom Jesus had appeared, *“After that he was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.”* The Apostles were quite confident that they could appeal to the experience of many different individuals to whom Jesus had appeared alive.

4. First Reading - Primary meaning to us. That the Apostles were to preach to the people that Jesus *“is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and of the dead... (and that) everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

5. Second Reading – The Resurrection is the assurance of our resurrection. This reading speaks of the assurance of salvation and eternal life for those who believe in Jesus. This recalls Romans 6:3-5.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

6. The Gospel Reading (Mk 16:1-8). This is the first testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus - the empty tomb. Apparently the women first went to the tomb in order to finish anointing the body, but, when they

arrived, the stone had been rolled away and an angel was there giving testimony to the resurrection of Jesus and telling them that they would see Jesus. The women went back and told Peter and the Apostles.

7. Alternative Gospel reading for the late afternoon and evening of Easter. Luke 24:13-35. **First appearance of Jesus.** It is to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He walks with them, teaches them, interpreting the Scriptures concerning himself, then when invited into their home, reveals his identity to them in the celebration of the Eucharist and disappears before their eyes.

8. What does the Resurrection mean for us?

1. It teaches us that **Jesus is God**. He is the long-awaited Messiah. His words are truth and he will judge us all when we die.
2. Because Jesus conquered sin and death by his death and resurrection, we no longer have to fear these and can look forward to a glorious resurrection if we follow Him faithfully (example of martyrs).
3. It means that we have the confidence to stand up for God and our faith in public debates (example of gay marriage, transgender errors, and freedom of religion arguments).

9. Key sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):

CCC 638 – 658 – “On the Third Day He Rose from the Dead.”
CCC 988 – 1019 – “I Believe in the Resurrection of the Dead”

10. Several books can be helpful with these issues and illustrating the reality of the supernatural.

Who Moved the Stone, by Frank Morrison, has been a best-seller for 79 years. As a skeptic, convinced that the Resurrection could not be true, he wanted to strip the story of its superstition and primitive beliefs and show how Jesus had been a great man. His investigations led him elsewhere, to faith, and this book is a classic in demonstrating the experiences and the logic that underlie the belief of the Church.

To Hell and Back, by Dr. Maurice S. Rawlings (specialist in cardiovascular diseases) has investigated cases of near-death experiences, with a special concern to see why more persons do not report seeing themselves going “to Hell”. Dr. Rawlings has been doing these studies for a long time and has reported remarkably consistent results.

The Other Side by Michael H. Brown deals with the question, “What happens when we die?” What is prepared for you? What do they say is the key to a good “judgment” and a special place in the hereafter?

The author is a former investigative journalist as well as the director of the Catholic news website, www.spiritdaily.com

An Exorcist Tells His Story by Fr. Gabriel Amorth, chief exorcist for the Vatican over the past thirty years. His testimony to his lived experience provides additional evidence for a spiritual realm of reality which remains basically unknown to us except for its effects and the testimony of revealed truth from the Bible and the Church. He documents all kinds of evil forces and what they can do to humans and how they can be resisted and repelled. The single best protection? A sincere and accurate confession.

Proof of Heaven by Dr. Eben Alexander, Harvard trained neurosurgeon, who experienced a six day out of body event. He writes this book specifically to show that these events are real, they are not the result of a stressed or distressed body.

Questions for discussion and reflection:

1. This is the kind of material that made the martyrs. They knew that this world is temporary and something better for those who die in a right relationship with God. That is why they would face a painful death rather than renounce Jesus. Does this material help to strengthen your faith in the historical resurrection of Jesus? Would this help you to be willing to make a moral defense based on God?
2. The above testimonies to the reality of the supernatural should sharpen our commitment to God, both because of the positive benefits, but also because of the reality of Hell and being lost. What think you? How are you going to communicate this to your children and your grandchildren?
3. Why are we not, in the important and controversial debates concerning homosexuality and same-sex unions, speaking out from God’s point of view, quoting Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church? If we don’t use the resources of our faith in these debates, why do we need to argue for religious freedom and the ability to use free speech?

