

## "EXULTEMUS"

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HIS is the day that the Lord has made; let us exult, and rejoice in it!" With these words the Church celebrates Christ's victory over death. "Alleluia—praise ye the Lord"—is the Church's joyful cry. "Christ the Lord is risen today—Alleluia!"

Happiness — gladness — joy — these are the sentiments expressed in the liturgy on this greatest of the year's feasts—Easter. Happiness, gladness, joy are the emotions that should well up in the heart of every man living—because in this mystery of the Resurrection are signified so many things which should delight the mind of man. The Resurrection is the crowning work of the Redeemer, His victory over the cross and the grave, the exaltation merited by the deep humiliation of His Passion and death. It is the final proof of His divinity, the "sign of Jonas the prophet" promised to the arrogantly skeptical Pharisees. It is the cause of the resurrection of our bodies from the dust of the tomb to the glorious participation in Christ's eternal kingdom. It is the symbol of the soul's resurrection from the "sting of death . . . sin" to the life of those who hear the Son of Man.

As we sorrowed with Christ during Holy Week so now we should rejoice with Him. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. *For which cause God also hath exalted him.*<sup>1</sup> On the road to Emmaus, the risen Lord asked the two disciples, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into his glory?"<sup>2</sup> Christ's body had been the instrument of the Passion. The bloody sweat, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, the piercing with nails of hands and feet, with spear of the sacred side, the thirst, the dread three hours' agony—all these had been executed on that human body assumed by the Word

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<sup>1</sup> Phil., ii, 5-11.

<sup>2</sup> Luke, xxiv, 26.

of God for love of men and offered finally as a victim for the sins of men.

By the degradation of the Passion Christ merited a corresponding exaltation. The Blessed Virgin had declared the equity of Divine Justice: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble."<sup>3</sup> The Resurrection is a manifestation of Divine Justice. In the joyful words of the Mother of Christ let our happiness be expressed, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour."<sup>4</sup>

No element in the Resurrection should make us more intensely glad than the proof it gives us that Christ is really divine. Otherwise, as St. Paul says, "If Christ be not risen from the dead then is our preaching vain and your faith is vain."<sup>5</sup> Christ would be a fraud and an imposter. From the very first there have been those who deny the Resurrection. The Sadducees, even in Christ's lifetime, taught that there was no resurrection. Some among the Athenians mocked this "new doctrine"<sup>6</sup> of Paul. At Corinth and at Ephesus there were those "who have erred from the truth"<sup>7</sup> about the Resurrection. Throughout the centuries opponents have sought to make a breach in this foundation of our faith. They have hurled their heaviest assaults, their most insidious attacks against this bulwark—they have departed—the Resurrection remains triumphant.

What is this impregnable defense, this rampart on which the standard of the Cross is so firmly planted?

Resurrection, a recalling of bodies to life, may be defined as the "restitution of a body lost through death, and the reunion of the soul with the body." Among most primitive peoples there have been notions, more or less clearly defined, of the existence of the body together with the soul after death. Among the Orientals and especially among the Semites this belief was prevalent. Lagrange traces the Chaldean influence in this belief back at least two thousand years before Christ. Among the Jews the doctrine is more clearly seen. The Old Testament bears eloquent testimony to a resurrection.<sup>8</sup> In the New Testament, too, there are many references by Christ to His own particular Resurrec-

<sup>3</sup> Luke, i, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Luke, i, 47.

<sup>5</sup> I Cor., xv, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Acts, xvii, 32.

<sup>7</sup> II Tim., ii, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Job, xix, 25; Isaias, xxvi, 19; Daniel, xii, 2; II Machab., vii.

tion and to the general resurrection. "All things shall be accomplished," Jesus told His apostles, "which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man. For he shall be delivered to the Gentiles . . . and after they have scourged him, they will put him to death: *and the third day he shall rise again.*"<sup>9</sup> To the Jews, Christ said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."<sup>10</sup> But, adds St. John, "He spoke of the temple of his body."<sup>11</sup> Of all Christ's prophecies none was more direct and to the point than the sign of Jonas the prophet. Some of the Pharisees had said, "Master we would see a sign from thee. Who answering said to them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."<sup>12</sup> That this sign might be given Christ placed the circumstances: His death and burial.

Enemies of the faith have asserted that Christ had not really died but had only fainted on the Cross—that He was laid in the sepulchre in this condition—and that later when He regained His senses He simply walked out of the tomb. Such an assertion is absurd. The Roman centurian, a man who had long been familiar with the appearance of death, testified to the reality of Christ's death. The Roman soldier pierced with a lance our Saviour's side, inflicting a wound that would have been fatal if He were not already dead. The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves because they were not yet dead. "But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs."<sup>13</sup> That the high priests permitted Jesus to escape this indignity was due to the fact that their sworn purpose, His death, had been accomplished. Christ's own friends, the women from Galilee, Joseph, Nicodemus, were equally certain that their Master had given up His life. These faithful followers gave further evidence of His death by embalming the Saviour's body with a hundredpound-weight of spices and aromatic perfumes and then placing Him in the sepulchre.

Treachery was the first thought in the minds of the high priests. They feared lest the disciples of Christ might steal away

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<sup>9</sup> Luke, xviii, 31-33.

<sup>10</sup> John, ii, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., ii, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Matt., xii, 38-40.

<sup>13</sup> John, xix, 33.

His body and say, "The Lord is risen from the dead"; therefore they put the seal of the Sanhedrin on the stone of the sepulchre and stationed their soldiers on guard.<sup>14</sup> The high priests themselves thus made it impossible for anyone outside the sepulchre to remove the body of Christ. That the body should be removed from within was wholly beyond natural powers. In their very efforts to thwart the Divine Will the high priests only added a proof for the Resurrection of our Lord.

Did the Resurrection actually take place? Christ was really dead. His bitter enemies had taken precautions against fraud. Patently false was the testimony of the guards according to the instructions of the high priests, "Say you, His disciples came by night, and stole him away when we were asleep."<sup>15</sup> In the first place, Roman soldiers did not sleep while on duty. Secondly, if they were asleep their testimony as to the manner of disposal of Christ's body was worthless.

On the other hand, far from having removed the body of their Lord the holy women suspected Christ's enemies of having committed this desecration. Moreover, the arrangement of the garments in the sepulchre, as related by St. John,<sup>16</sup> indicated no trace of violence. The burial vestments had been neither snatched away nor hastily left behind, but folded with decent care.

The absence of Christ's most loving mother when the others visited the tomb—although she had been steadfast at the foot of the Cross—is understood as a confirmation of His Resurrection. She so much better than the other followers of Christ had pondered the prophecies concerning Him that there was in her mind no slightest doubt that He would rise in glory. As the Redeemer had been born of the Virgin Mary, her precious virginity remaining inviolate, so from the closed sepulchre, the seal unbroken, He arose in glory. It is suggested—and what more fitting—that Christ first appeared in His glory to her who first beheld Him in His humility; and that the Evangelists omitted reference to this fact, the testimony of His mother being of less value in confirmation of her Son's Resurrection than that of less interested persons.

Finally, and most conclusive, was the indisputable testimony of witnesses, not of one or two or a handful—but by more than

<sup>14</sup> Matt., xxvi, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Matt., xxviii, 13.

<sup>16</sup> John, xx, 7.

five hundred at once, as St. Paul testifies. These witnesses were not deluded self-seekers but hard-headed, matter-of-fact men and women who were willing to die and who did die in glorious martyrdom to bear testimony of the Resurrection.

"This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof all we are witnesses."<sup>17</sup>

We should rejoice with the Church on this day because Christ's Resurrection is a proof and a symbol of our own bodily resurrection. "I will raise him up on the last day,"<sup>18</sup> said the Lord. What better proof could He give of our future resurrection than by doing for Himself what He has promised to do for us? Likewise His Resurrection is the symbol and the cause of ours. "Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep; for by a man (Adam) came death, and by a man (Christ) the resurrection of the dead."<sup>19</sup> It is of faith that the Resurrection of Christ was first both in time and dignity. St. Thomas indicates two ways in which a resurrection may be effected: first, release from actual death, so that the risen one lives anew, subject however to the necessity of dying again; in another way, release not only from death but from the necessity, even from the possibility of dying again. The latter is a true and perfect resurrection. It is in this perfect resurrection that Christ is the first of them who rise.

St. Thomas further states, quoting Aristotle, that the first in any order is the cause of all that come after it. Thus Christ's Resurrection is the cause of ours. As fire first heats the nearest air and through it heats bodies that are further off, says the Angelic Doctor, so the Word of God first bestows immortal life upon that body which is united with Himself, and through it works the resurrection in all other bodies. This last effect need not follow immediately but according as the Word of God disposes, namely, at the end of the world.

God Himself is the first effective cause of miraculous works and as the resurrection will be a supernatural work He is its cause. But the effective instrumental cause is the humanity of Christ which because of its hypostatic union with the Word of God has a divinely communicated power to bring about the resurrection. The exemplary cause is Christ's Resurrection itself to

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<sup>17</sup> Acts, ii, 32.

<sup>18</sup> John, vi, 40.

<sup>19</sup> I Cor., xv, 20.



which ours ought to be conformed. "He will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory"<sup>20</sup>—a body possessing all the qualities of a glorified body, impassibility, subtilty, agility, clarity, a body perfect in all its members, a body made at last a fit complement of our immortal souls.

"We shall be changed," says St. Paul. ". . . And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>21</sup>

Besides the resurrection of our bodies there is another resurrection to which Christ refers. It is for us the most important thing in life—the resurrection of the soul. "Whoso heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life everlasting; and cometh not into judgment but is passed from death to life."<sup>22</sup> Commenting on these words, St. Augustine says, "He could not pass from death to life, were he not first in death, and not in life. He 'was dead,' therefore, 'and is alive again; was lost and is found.'<sup>23</sup> Consequently there does take place *even now* a resurrection, and men pass from a death to a life; from the death of infidelity to the life of faith; from the death of falsehood to the life of truth; from the death of iniquity to the life of righteousness. It follows that this also is a resurrection from the dead."<sup>24</sup> It is to this resurrection the Apostle refers: "He was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification."<sup>25</sup> St. Paul further says, "We are buried together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life."<sup>26</sup> Through baptism the power of sin over man's soul is destroyed. Since our death to sin is like to Christ's death then, as the Apostle points out, the resurrection of our souls will be like unto His Resurrection.

"In your Resurrection, O Christ, the heavens and the earth rejoice." May the echo of the Church's joyful song sound in the hearts of men!

<sup>20</sup> Phil., iii, 21.

<sup>21</sup> I Cor., xv, 52-57.

<sup>22</sup> John, v, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Luke, xv, 32.

<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine, *Hom.* 19—*John* v, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Rom., iv, 25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 4.