

## Sermon Easter Day 2022

The resurrection of the Lord Christ appears as a flash of light against the dark night of human existence. The resurrection is as an explosion, a meteor shooting through the sky. It is a brilliant flash of light that cannot be ignored. It is an explosion, indeed a big bang, which pierces our gloom. It is a light that has not dimmed through the passing of centuries, but only grown! And a light into which we are caught. A light to which we fix our sights and seek to navigate our way.

In part, this is what makes the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead the single most important event in the history of the world: it reverberates even to this time and this place. And so, it is important to state, that our celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Christ is not as some mysterious and curious historical moment, but as an event that impacts us. And something that has universal consequence, something that touches us, that leaves an imprint through all time and indeed eternity. It is of course a staggering claim that Christians make for the resurrection. But of necessity. High and exalted claims *need* to be made for the resurrection, otherwise, it means nothing, and we are wasting our time.

Saint Paul puts it all on the table when he says, *if Christ has not been raised from the dead then our faith has been in vain*. This is what is at stake! Everything hinges on the one sublime mystery we recall today, the one wondrous moment upon which the entire history of the world pivots. *But Christ has been raised from the dead*, Paul goes on to assure us, *the first fruits of those who have died*.

It is important, then, to be clear what we are talking about in the resurrection of Christ. Because we *are not* talking about some resuscitated corpse, as is often supposed by even well-meaning Christians. The popular culture delights in this idea, as one of the reasons why Christianity can be so easily dismissed, as if we worship some sort of zombie god. And if this were the Christian faith, it *would be* rightly disparaged and rejected. Because ultimately, a resuscitated corpse means nothing, because it would have no power to heal, save & redeem. Jesus has not returned to a normal human life like Lazarus and others whom Jesus raised from the dead. Rather, Jesus has entered upon a different life, a new life, which we must simply call 'resurrected life'. Christ's body is not a resuscitated body, but a *resurrected* body, indeed, a *glorious* body. It requires a new category. It is a new reality. It is a new thing. And it required of the first disciples a complete reorientation of their lives, a complete change of direction.

As the gospel and other New Testament writers grapple to come to terms with this 'new thing' they fall back in stunned awe. Their language, and the worldview they inherit, is stretched to accommodate this 'new thing'. But say something they must. Look at the New Testament record, examine it on its own terms, and we see that we are not dealing here with fantasy, or delusion, or deceit, but something akin to an explosion of light on the stage of human history. *Lives change in response to it.* The irresistible conviction that shines through in the New Testament is that the 'new thing' brought about in the resurrection has radical, life-changing, eternal, consequence. The early followers of Jesus must say something simply because it was experienced as true.

Now, every charge and every accusation has been laid against this truth, against the church's faith in the resurrection. They are as old as the faith itself! But every charge and accusation can be dismissed as hollow, as misguided, as ignorant. In part, because of the ripples that shake us here and now. Because the charges and accusations which seek to dismiss the truth of Christ's resurrection cannot account for how men and women the world over can know, love, *and encounter* the Lord Christ, even today, even amongst us.

The resurrection of the Lord Christ is a flash of light against the dark night of human existence, a light to which we are still drawn, which still illuminates the way for us. Now, a solitary candle on a windowpane can be a beacon for miles. But we have set before us *this* pillar of fire which leads us through our darkness, this candle, this Easter Candle, set high for all to see. It was carried into the dark, tomb-like church last night with the acclamation: *The light of Christ!* In the early Church, Baptism was also called the Sacrament of Illumination: God's light enters into us; we become children of light. When we are baptized, the fire of this light is brought down deep within ourselves. That flash of light, that mysterious explosion from the tomb, comes to us, and by it *we* are meant to orient our lives, we are meant to be guided by it. Christian faith, then, – easter faith – means we must not allow this light to be extinguished! We must protect it from all the forces that seek to eliminate it and to cast us back into darkness!

In a few moments, we come to renew our baptismal promises committing anew to sharing in Christ's death and his resurrection. In Baptism, we assent to follow Christ and his way of light and life. And so, in a few moments we recommit to that, as I ask you: *do you turn to Christ*, to which, God willing, you will all resoundingly acclaim *I turn to Christ!* Christian life is a turning. Turning to the One True Light.

Christian life, if it means anything, is a reorientation, away from ourselves, to the *only* One truly deserving our devotion and attention. And this means we must turn from the world, the flesh, and the devil *to* Christ, to *his* life, *his* truth, *his* love. We must turn away from all those forces of destruction, desecration and degradation at work all about us. Resurrection life means we resist that urge to betray all that is good and true and beautiful in our world, and instead be agents of light. And so, I will also ask you, *do reject Satan, and all that is false and unjust*, to which you will respond, *I do!* Turning *to* Christ and his life-giving light means turning away darkness and death.

In the early Church there was a custom whereby the priest, after the sermon, would cry out to the faithful: “*Conversi ad Dominum*” – turn now towards the Lord. This was a time before pews in church and the congregation would gather and move to where the action was occurring in the liturgy. One moment around the font, perhaps, another moment around the lectern or pulpit, and then together toward the altar. *Conversi ad Dominum*” – turn now towards the Lord! It meant, firstly, that the congregation would turn towards the East, towards the rising sun, the ‘Risen Son’, and the sign of Christ returning, the One whom we go to meet when we celebrate the Eucharist. And this custom is precisely what we maintain in this church. But this physical turning, this physical orientation, also speaks of how we are to orient ourselves *inwardly* towards the Lord. This is what we mean when we speak of conversion: the turning of our soul towards Jesus, towards the light of the one true God.

Turn to the Lord! In that acclamation we are invited to a renewal of our Baptism: to turn away *from* false paths, and *to* the Risen and Glorified One. Easter faith is turning ever anew towards him, toward Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We must be converted ever anew, turning with our whole life towards the Lord. And ever anew we must withdraw our hearts from those forces which seek to pull us away. All about us are forces which seek to diminish and destroy, which seek to extinguish the light. Those first witnesses to the empty tomb were not met with darkness, but with a light that shook them to the core and changed them forever. On this most holy day, we celebrate how, in the curious economy of God, we – yes we! – are called to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ! In the strange way that God deals with humankind, we vessels of clay can *testify to the truth* of that flash of light, that explosion from the tomb, and how it changes us. *Conversi ad Dominum* – turn now towards the Lord! Do so, and we can become men and women of light. Amen.