

The Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord
21 April, Anno Domini 2019
St. Mark 16:1-8
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Today, we gather to celebrate the one thing that is able to bring hope into the darkest hours of sadness and despair. The tomb of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God who was crucified on Golgotha, is empty. Not because his disciples stole His corpse in the middle of the night. Not because He really only fainted on the cross and was revived by the cool air of the tomb. But because His Blood was sufficient to render full payment for the sins of all people. Jesus is no longer in the tomb because the death which hung over all mankind, the death of eternal judgment, the death that wreaks havoc on people and communities and nations every day, was finally swallowed up and rendered impotent as Christ led the victory procession through hell and rose again on this day, the third day.

Our joy isn't simply that Jesus isn't dead. If that's the case, there's really nothing for us to rejoice in. If His resurrection doesn't directly impact us, it is useless and we've all wasted our time this morning. Of course, death has no power over God. That's no surprise or mystery. But Jesus didn't hang on that cross only as God. He wasn't a phantom or illusion. It was real flesh, like yours through which the nails were driven. It was real blood like yours that flowed down from His head, His hands, His back. God and man in one person suffered in agony, prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies, cried out in anguish as He cast Himself into the hands of His Father.

The two natures in Christ, the eternally begotten Second Person of the Holy Trinity, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God and the man, born of the Virgin Mary who grew, who hungered, who wept, who thirsted, who bled and who died is a comforting doctrine clearly taught in Holy Scripture which is absolutely necessary for our salvation and absolutely necessary for us to believe. Without it, there is no salvation. Without it there is no comfort for you and me this day. If Jesus is not God then He cannot have lived a holy and perfect life. If Jesus is not divine then His death cannot be sufficient for the sins of the whole world. And if He is not fully and completely man then He is no substitute for us and He cannot take our place under God's wrath and the Law's condemnation.

But thanks be to God, Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily, born under the Law so that He could redeem you and me who are under the Law, so that He can be the true Lamb of Atonement offered as the propitiation for our sins. If Jesus is anything less than either true God or true man, then our salvation is lost and we are still lost and condemned creatures, slaves under the tyrannical rule of Satan, who have no hope of being restored to God and only the certainty of eternal judgment.

However, since Jesus is both God and man, what you have to celebrate today, O sinner, is your own resurrection to eternal life. Because Jesus was tempted in every way you were to rebel against the Word and will of His heavenly Father, because He, as a man learned obedience through what He suffered as you do, because He suffered the assaults of the devil and was beset on every side by affliction and rejection, because He is exactly as you are only without ever having sinned, He can stand in your place offering Himself as a sufficient ransom for you and for the sins of the whole world. His suffering wasn't fake. The temptations were real. He truly hungered and thirsted and wept. He slept. He walked on feet like yours and blessed with hands like yours. He takes up a finite and particular space. He felt physical pain, sadness, and loneliness like you do. His heart and brain waves stopped just like yours. He died, like you do.

Jesus is not less or more human than you are. He is not some kind of uber-Mensch, a man who was simply given extra or even heightened powers that you already have. His flesh is as your flesh. But even as He is fully man, He is also fully and completely God. He isn't one-third of God or a mask that God wears at times. He is truly God. He shares perfectly the will and glory of the Father. He is fully omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, unchanging, perfectly holy, just, faithful, merciful, gracious, and loving. He is the Creator by whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made that is made.

And in a virtually indescribably mystery, these two seemingly incompatible natures, divine and human, have been joined together in such a way that each one shares with the other all of the attributes and characteristics that are proper to it. Neither is changed into the other. Jesus isn't some kind of new species as though the divine and the human were shaken up in a jar and something new came out. Both natures maintain those attributes that are proper to each but those attributes are all communicated and exercised through both natures. It is truly a unique relationship unlike any other in all creation. It is a mystery that defies explanation and can only be received by faith.

But this mystery, this perfect and inseparable union is exactly what we are celebrating today and every day because the personal union of God and man in Jesus, means that the victory which Jesus has won over death as a man belongs to all men. We have a man like us who has born all of our griefs and sorrows, who has suffered temptation and torment, pain and death, just as we have and will, who has been laid into the grave just as we will be. And not only did He endure all these things as we did, but He endured them FOR US, in our place. All that we are to do and be, He was for us, as us. As we were knit together in the womb of our mother, so was He. As we were born, so was He. As we were to grow and perfectly submit ourselves to our parents, He did. As we were supposed to love and learn and meditate on the Word of God and treasure it as our highest good, He did. As we were to entrust ourselves completely and absolutely to the will of God, He did. As we were to pour out our lives in love to our neighbor and even our enemy, He did. As our lips were to be filled only with the truth and praise of God, His were.

All of that was for our good and benefit. Again, of course the Son of God would do those things. But He did those things as a man, a real and true man, like you. But He didn't do that, as most suppose, simply to show you what you are to do. The Ten Commandments already do that along with revealing the fact that we do none of those things. Instead our hearts are far from God. We, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, doing what is right in our own eyes, which is always sin, always contrary to the will of God.

Jesus did those things so that His faithfulness could be credited against your unfaithfulness. He did those things so that He could clothe Himself in your unrighteousness and, in exchange, clothe you in His perfect righteousness. Everything that Jesus accomplished was for the sole purpose of giving it all to sinners so that instead of receiving the just punishment for our sins, we would instead be made children of the Most High God and heirs of His heavenly kingdom. Jesus laid claim to your debt and paid it off in full, not with gold or silver, but with His own Blood.

And now, having satisfied fully the judgment against our sin, having been forsaken by the Father as we should be, having taken away any claim that Satan had over us, wiping out our debt, Jesus is the first to taste the fruits of His passion. Where sin has been taken away, death no longer has hold. And thus the God-man takes up His life once again, leaving death and the grave behind. It is indeed finished. Death no longer has any power because no sin has been left un-atoned for.

But Jesus is only the first to pass through death to life. The wages of all your sin have been paid and death can no longer hold you. Jesus' empty grave is the promise that you will leave your grave behind, that the very body that sits in the pew before me today, will follow Jesus and look upon Him and with Him live forever where no death or sin or devil will ever be able to harm or trouble you again, where there will no longer be sadness or division. Jesus' empty grave is the promise that the funeral of all who trust in Him is but a temporary laying to rest until the day of Resurrection to eternal life.

This is the promise of Baptism. The day you were Baptized is the day in which you were joined to the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is the day when you sprang forth from your grave because Jesus did. All that Jesus did was applied directly to you. Every promise of forgiveness, life, healing, and resurrection was bestowed upon you. And here, in the Holy Communion, we feast on the living and ascended Jesus. He is no longer dead. He was crucified but now He is eternally alive at the right hand of God. And in this meal, He sows the seed of His living Body in your own so that when you die, His life will spring forth and bring you forth from the tomb. And as death no longer has any power over Him, it will no longer have power over you.

So rejoice, O believer. Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified is not in the tomb. The Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, your Brother is alive and He has gone before you into the heavenly places so that you might follow Him out of death and the grave into paradise. The grave will not hold you. The only thing that will remain in the grave is your sin and death. You will rise. You will go to be with Jesus who even now comes to be with you, to give you His Body and Blood as a pledge of your resurrection to eternal life.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus, our God and our Brother, is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.