

## The Solemnity of the Resurrections of the Lord--Easter: Killed So We Can Live

*Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.*

I always had trouble with that statement. It seemed to me to be absurd. Yet, the evangelist Luke recorded it. He must have had a reason. Better, the Holy Spirit must have had a reason that the statement be recorded. The words in question were spoken by a man whose name was never mentioned. He was only called a thief. Later, people would refer to him as the Good Thief. Tradition has given him the name "Dismis," but we really do not know his name. His name was not important. It is what he said that was important. And, yet what he said was so strange. What the Good Thief, Dismis if you wish, said was directed to the other thief, hanging on a cross on the other side of Jesus. How absurd. He said that God Himself had been condemned. Certainly, this was an exaggeration, or at the very least a Lucan hyperbole for dramatic effect.

But Sacred Scripture is not so shallow. The Primitive Church recited the accounts of the Passion over and over, emphasizing every word, every scene, every concept. Why was St. Luke so adamant in recording that God had been condemned? What did the Holy Spirit want us to learn?

Simply, the Holy Spirit wanted us to know that the world had no use for God. The pagan Romans, like all pagans, were only concerned with materialism. They had their fables of gods, but the intelligentia among them didn't believe the stories. Nor did they really believe the emperors were divine. The Emperor Tiberius, in his death throes said, mockingly, "I must be becoming a god." The leaders of the Jewish people believe in God, but they also believe that the political situation was too delicate to have a Messiah. The timing wasn't right. A Messiah could bring down the wrath of Rome and threaten their cushy existence. They certainly did not want a Messiah who claimed to be the Son of the Most High. They turned that claim against Jesus saying that this was blasphemy, giving them an excuse to condemn him to death. The world had no use for God. It wanted God dead. So His Incarnate Presence was murdered along with common, everyday criminals. The Evangelists wanted us to know that although the world killed God, only his human body died.

The world killed God. Years ago *Time Magazine* had a cover article, "Is God Dead?" Of course the article came out at Easter time, for you could expect no less from those who are on the attack against religion and against all who profess faith. The sad answer to the question "Is God dead?" is that for some people, "Yes, God is dead," well, at least in their minds, and in their social structure He is dead.

The social structure of many in the world results in lives of quiet desperation. Many have no use for God. As a result, many question life itself. To the atheistic existentialist, the only reasonable conclusion to life is suicide. Thus wrote Jean Paul

Sartre. Obviously, it is not reasonable for people to kill themselves. The basic instinct is the instinct for survival. But it is common for people to condemn themselves to a life where they would be better off dead. For example, the person who lies and cheats and steals from all around him or her without caring how this effects others condemns himself or herself to a life without any real friends, to a life with nothing to show for it after death. The person who uses others, including his or her family, to satisfy his or her own personal needs, has no real family, and no real life. People who are dead inside cannot envision a living God.

But God is not dead. He is not dead to the thief, to the murderer, to the prostitute, to the addict or to us. God is alive. Jesus rose from the dead and proclaimed that death has no hold on Him. Death has no hold on God. Yes, his Incarnate Body was put to death, but death lost its grip. Jesus triumphed over death. God the Father raised Jesus his Son from the dead.

That good thief prayed one last prayer before his life came to an end. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The world could not kill God. Nor can it kill those who luxuriate in the Life of God. The Good Thief's act of faith, his act of kindness in what he said to the Crucified Christ, resulted in his sharing the eternal life of that God whom the world tried to destroy.

We, who have received the eternal life of the Lord at our Baptism, have been told that as long as we hold onto this Easter Life, He will raise us up when our lives come to an end.

The first New Testament Reading of the Easter Season is the most important lesson of our lives:

*Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. That is Romans 6:3-6.*

This reading does not just tell us about the Lord. It teaches us about ourselves. We have been given a new life. We are no longer held in the grip of evil. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer part of a dead world. We are the living people of the Lord.

"Don't give up. Don't ever give up," the North Carolina State basketball coach, Jim Valvano spoke so well encouraging others to join him in the fight against cancer.

On Easter, the Lord says the same thing to us, "Don't give up!" We can never give up. We are engaged in the battle for the Kingdom of God.

The Lord says, "Don't give up when people mock you for your faith in me."

The Lord says, "Don't give up when others seek to destroy you for whom you are."

He says, "Don't give up when you fall, when you are at your worst."

He says, "Don't give up. Get up. Let me help you. Let me raise you up. Let me restore your life. Don't give up. Remember, I was killed so you can live."

Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

And so have we.

By living out our baptismal commitment, we join the Lord in defeating the grip of death.

Alleluia! Easter is not just about Jesus. It is about us. We have been given the New Life of the Lord. We cry out to Him with our lives, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And we receive the promise of faith, the great hope of Christianity, "Today you will be with me in paradise."