

## **Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord: Jesus Wins, Love Wins, Jesus Is Love**

My brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Jesus Christ is the victor over death. Love has won. Jesus Christ is love.

We often use flowers to express love. Today on Easter Sunday we are surrounded by flowers. The flowers around us remind us of three Gardens, a garden of temptation, a garden of challenge, and a garden of victory.

The first garden is the Garden of Paradise. The ancient wisdom scholars who were inspired to write the *Book of Genesis* tell how God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise. *Genesis* describes it as a garden of beauty, a garden with an abundance of fruit, a garden of joy. It was a garden where mankind had everything he needed. But it was a garden that demanded humility. Man had to recognize his and her dependence on God. Adam and Eve refused to do this. They thought that they could be like God, could be their own gods. And the garden of Paradise became a place of sin. There is little difference between the story in *Genesis* and the present state of the world as people, and sadly as we, often act as though we do not need God.

And all the beauties that God has given us become nothing more than the backdrop for sin.

In the delightful anthropomorphism of *Genesis*, God walked through the Garden looking for Adam and Eve. They were hiding. They knew they had given in to temptation. They knew that they had offended God. They were overwhelmed with guilt. They had to hide. "Perhaps," they thought, "if he does not notice us, our sin will be forgotten." We do this all the time. We sin and then hide from God, hoping that the sin will be forgotten, buried in time. The problem is that we cannot hide sin from God, and we cannot hide sin from ourselves.

Adam and Eve realized that they were naked. Sin had turned that which was beautiful into an occasion for more sin. Adam and Eve were no longer comfortable in their own skin. That is what sin does to us all. We are no longer comfortable in our own skin. When we sin, we have a problem looking into the mirror. We don't see the person we hoped we could be. When we sin, we also have a problem looking others in the eye. Actually, we have a problem looking at others, period. We no longer see them as reflections of God. Instead we see in them the images of our own sin. When we sin we become masters of transference.

God found Adam and Eve. There were horrible consequences for their letting sin into the world. They brought suffering and death to their progeny, But before expelling them from Paradise, God helped them grapple with the terrible reality of sin. He sewed fig leaves for them to cover themselves up. This was not about sex. This was about being vulnerable. This is what sin does to us. It makes us weak. It makes

us vulnerable. But God loves us even in our sins. He offers us fig leaves. He gives us His protection. He covers us with His Grace.

God also made a promise to Adam and Eve. He promised that a time would come when the evil that they submitted to would be destroyed. A time would come when death would be destroyed. One would come whose humility and love would be so profound that the devil himself would be defeated. "O happy fault," we sing in the Exultet, the solemn hymn sung before the Paschal Candle at the beginning of the vigil. "O happy fault, the sin of Adam has gained for us so great a Redeemer."

So here is our God, in the garden of Paradise, giving us hope, hope for healing from the devastation we bring upon ourselves with our own sins. In the first garden God is telling us, "Do not give up. Do not give up on yourselves. I will not give up on you. I love you too much to let you be in pain. I refuse to let you remain vulnerable. There is hope for healing. There is a magnificent Redeemer from sin, my Eternal Word. I will give Him to you, and He will return you to me." He will defeat death. Jesus Christ will defeat death. He will win. Love always wins. Jesus Christ is love.

We come now to the second garden, the garden of Gethsemani. Jesus was in this garden, the Eternal Word emptied of His divinity, overwhelmed by the realization of the sacrifice He would make to fulfill the Father's plan for mankind. His prayer was so intense that His sweat turned into blood. We know what he prayed. His prayer was, "Father, let this pass, but thy will be done."

The garden of Gethsemani is the garden of challenge and the garden of choice. We visit this garden often. There is turmoil in our family, and we want to strike out at the offender. But our Christianity calls us to kindness not vengeance. There are crises and tragedies, and we join the Lord and pray, "Let this pass," but we also add, "Thy will be done. Help me, Lord, to use this challenge as a way to draw others closer to you, as a way for me to draw closer to you." In the garden of Gethsemani we unite our pains and sufferings to the cross of Jesus Christ and know that somehow God will transform tragedy into triumph.

We are people of faith. We are people of hope. We can allow the challenges of our lives to be opportunities to choose God. The garden of challenge can be a garden of choice. And, so, the young girl holds her baby and thanks God that this unexpected change in her life plans has made her a better person, more loving, and now with a new love in her life. And the parents who will never overcome the death of their child, become wonderful care givers for others who are grieving. And the man whose job is reduced or eliminated still recognizes the true priorities of life. Through the grace of God, the challenges of our Gethsemani's can be opportunities for growth in His Love. Jesus Christ wins. Love wins. Jesus Christ is Love.

The garden of Gethsemani points us to the third garden, the garden of the Resurrection. "Now near the place where He had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus

there." Mary Magdeline went to that garden on Easter Sunday morning. And there she found her greatest hope realized. There she found the Lord, risen from the dead.

We also have come to that garden. We have found the Lord. Or perhaps it is better said, He has found us. He gives us His life. Baptism, the Easter sacrament, infuses us with the Life of God. And our greatest hope has been realized. Jesus Christ has defeated the power of evil in the world and in our own lives. We are not alone. Jesus Christ is with us, always. The temptations of the garden of Paradise and the challenges of the garden of Gethsemani, have been conquered on that hill near the garden of the Resurrection. Jesus Christ is the Victor. And we Christians, tempted and challenged throughout our lives rejoice in the spiritual life we have been given on Easter Sunday. For Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. We are His. And He is ours..

My brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Jesus Christ is the victor over death. Love has won. Jesus Christ is love. May you and your families rejoice in the Love that is forever. May your lives flourish with the gift of Easter. May we all be flowers in the Garden of the Lord.