

## The Solemnity of the Resurrection of the Lord, Easter: Happiness in Hope

The flowers, the Easter appointments, the joyful music, the Alleluias, even the Easter suits and dresses and for some, bonnets, all proclaim our joy in the renewal of the world, our Easter joy.

The celebration of Easter stands in stark contrast to our commemoration of Good Friday. On Good Friday there were no flowers, no alleluias, no solemn music. There was the Cross.

And yet, both Good Friday and Easter, as well as Holy Thursday, are bound together into one celebration, the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The name paschal refers to the lamb who was sacrificed and whose sacrifice brought life.

You see, before Jesus' sacrifice mankind had lost the capacity to have a spiritual life. Mankind's sin, his decision to push God out of his life, destroyed his own spiritual life. God is the Lord of Life, but mankind decided that he did not need God. His choice of sin was a choice of death. His pushing God aside allowed the devil to have free reign on the earth. Without God, without a spiritual life, mankind's existence was limited to the here and now. There was no hereafter for him. No eternity. Life ended, and that was that.

But, to use a biblical term, *in the fullness of time*, that means when God saw fit, the Eternal Word of God came as the new Adam, the one who would choose life. Through a paradox beyond our understanding, Jesus' death was a means for restoring life to his brothers and sisters, to us.

Jesus rose from the dead and became the source of spiritual life to all who believe in Him. This is why we call out Alleluia. We are dead no more, but alive in the Lord. The sign of our acceptance of the Life of the Lord is our baptism, or, more properly, our living our baptismal commitment.

But how about those who have never been baptized? What happened to the just Jew, like Martin Buber, or the spiritual Hindu, like Mohatma Ghandi, or the moral, humanitarian atheist, like so many we all know? How about these people? Do they have no future after death? We prayed for these people in the ancient petitions of Good Friday. Why did we pray for them? If they have no spiritual life, then they are dead. But, they are not dead. Our faith teaches us that Jesus descended to the dead. He called forth from death those who desired to do what was right and good, people of good will, who by choosing to be moral were therefore choosing to have union with God no matter what concept of God they had. Theologians have a name for their salvation. They call it Baptism of Desire.

Every Good Friday, I marvel at the people who came up to venerate the cross. I am blessed to know many of their stories, your stories. I see people come forward expressing a deep faith that the Lord will care for them and their loved ones, a deep

trust that all will be well even if the future is uncertain. They represent all the people who are in pain right now, all those who are suffering. They represented those who are fighting cancer and other serious ailments. I particularly thought about and was praying for two twenty-two year old young girls, one in our parish and one up north, who have learned to endure continual pain. I also thought about and prayed for those whose marriages or families have fallen apart, the single parents, the parentless children. All of these came up to venerate the cross. All of these, like all serious Christians, have found happiness in their hope.

St. Augustine loved that phrase, *happiness in hope*. He used it several times in his greatest work, *The City of God*, to describe the Christian attitude in life. It is true that we have to do everything possible to bring peace and justice to the world, this is our way of serving Christ's presence in the poor and downtrodden. We certainly have to protect the lives of those who have been conceived but have not yet been born. It is true that we have to fight to end poverty in our country and in our world. We cannot turn our backs on people who are suffering, whether they be Americans or people in another country or continent. We have to demand that those in leadership use their authority justly, even, dare I say, in a Christ like way. And yet, we know that in the end, our society cannot provide lasting happiness for anyone. The society of man can only provide lasting happiness if it is united to God, if it is a City of God.

We Christians have as our happiness the hope of eternal life. Easter is the celebration of hope. Our hope is that we will share in the fullness of the New Life Jesus won for us through His suffering and death.

Christ was raised so we can share His New Life. We need to grasp on to our faith with both hands. Only our faith brings sanity and meaning and purpose to our lives. \_Sickness and death, turmoil, unemployment, and all sorts of other crises enter our lives, but our faith gets us through because despite the suffering we have happiness in hope. No one can take the Risen Savior from us. No one and no situation, no matter how terrible, can take His Presence from us.

This is the Gift of Easter Sunday! We have entered the spiritual. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. May our spiritual lives have an infinite precedence over our physical lives.

May the life of the Risen Lord flow through our veins, so that every thought word and deed of our lives \_may shout out: Jesus Lives!

And may we all be happy in the hope of eternal life.