

EASTER SUNDAY

Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Church. It marks the birthday of our eternal hope. “Easter” literally means “the feast of fresh flowers.” We celebrate it with pride and jubilation for three reasons:

1) The Resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian Faith, for it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your Faith is in vain... And if Christ has not been raised, then your Faith is a delusion, and you are still lost in your sins... But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (I Cor 15:14, 17, 20). In the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC #638): “The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our Faith in Christ, a Faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross...” If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, then the Church is a fraud and Faith is a sham. But if Jesus really did rise from the dead, his message is true! Without the Resurrection, Jesus would have remained forever a good person who had met a tragic end. People would remember some of his teachings, and a handful of people might try to live according to them. All the basic doctrines of Christianity are founded on the truth of the Resurrection. “Jesus is Lord; He is risen!” (Rom 10:9) was the central theme of the kerygma (or “preaching”), of the apostles. There is a story of two women who stood before Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. One asked, “Why can’t we build structures like this anymore?” Her friend answered, “The people who built this had Faith. Today we have only opinions. And you can’t build a cathedral with opinions.”

2) Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: “I am the Resurrection and the Life; whoever believes in Me will live even though he dies” (Jn 11:25-26). Christ will raise us up on the last day, but it is also true, in a sense, that we have already risen with Christ. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, our Christian life is already a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ (CCC #1002, #1003).

3) Easter is a feast that gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows, and tears. Easter reminds us that life is worth living. It is our belief in the Real Presence of the Risen Jesus — in our souls, in His Church, in the Blessed Sacrament, and in Heaven —

that gives meaning to our personal as well as to our common prayers. Our trust in the all-pervading presence of the Risen Lord gives us strength to fight against temptations and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears. The prayer of St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland, reads: “Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ within me, never to part.”

The Reasons why we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus: (a) Jesus himself testified to his Resurrection from the dead (Mark 8:31; Matthew 17:22; Luke 9:22). (b) The tomb was empty on Easter Sunday (Luke 24:3). Although the guards claimed (Matthew 28:13) that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body, every sensible Jew knew that it was impossible for the terrified disciples of Jesus to have stolen the body of Jesus from a tomb guarded by a 16-member team of armed Roman soldiers. (c) The initial disbelief of Jesus’ own disciples in his Resurrection, despite his repeated apparitions. This serves as a strong proof of his Resurrection. It also explains why the apostles started preaching the resurrected Christ only after receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. (d) The transformation of Jesus’ disciples: The disciples of Jesus were almost immediately transformed from men who were hopeless and fearful after the crucifixion (Luke 24:21, John 20:19) into men who were confident and bold witnesses of the Resurrection (Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:2). (e) The Jews and the Romans could not disprove Jesus’ Resurrection by presenting the dead body of Jesus. (f) The apostles and early Christians would not have faced martyrdom if they were not absolutely sure of Jesus’ Resurrection. (g) The Apostle Paul’s conversion from a persecutor of Christians into a zealous apostle, preaching the Good News of Jesus throughout much of the Gentile world, supports the truth of Jesus’ Resurrection (Galatians 1:11-17, Acts 9:1, Acts 9:24-25, Acts 26:15-18). (h) The sheer existence of a thriving, Empire-conquering early Christian Church, bravely facing three centuries of persecution, supports the truth of the Resurrection claim. (i) The New Testament witnesses do not bear the stamp of dupes or deceivers. (j) The apostles and the early Christians were absolutely sure about the Resurrection of Jesus.

We need to remember Easter in our Good Fridays: Easter reminds us that every Good Friday in our lives will have an Easter Sunday and that Jesus will let us share the power of his Resurrection. Each time we display our love of others, we share in the Resurrection. Each time we face a betrayal of trust and, with God’s grace, forgive the betrayer and forget the offense, we share in the Resurrection of Jesus. Each time we fail in our attempts to ward off temptations – but keep on trying to overcome them – we share in the Resurrection. Each time we continue to hope – even when our hope seems unanswered – we share in the power of Jesus’ Resurrection. In short, the message of Easter is that nothing can destroy us

– not pain, sin, rejection, betrayal, or death. Because Christ has conquered all these, we, too, can conquer them — if we put our Faith and trust in Him.