

LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

On Easter, the Church's greatest feast on earth, we praise God for the Resurrection of Christ, when life triumphed over death and divine love over human sin, which did its worst against that Love Incarnate. The Easter season then continues for 50 days until Pentecost, when we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the earliest Christian community, sending them forth to proclaim the faith to all the world. During this season, it is helpful to remember how the Resurrection changes our lives and makes our perspective radically different from those who have not been given our faith.

One, fundamental, undeniable, unchangeable fact of our existence here on earth is that our lives, as individuals and nations, will end in death. How we deal with this fact, or fail to deal with it, defines how we live. There are the Gnostic, Bhuddist and similar "other-worldly" solutions that try to escape from life in this world, denying its fundamental reality, and seeking salvation merely as disembodied spirits. There is also the Stoic solution that one should not love anything or anyone in this world very much, for it will all end. More common these days is the materialist idea that salvation is only in the world, and that one should simply build and have as many things for as long in this world as possible, fending off death and the thought of it for a time, but knowing that it will triumph in the end. Perhaps most common is the superficially pleasant, but ultimately sad, view of the pleasure seeker who says, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

The Resurrection gives us a deep hope and challenge that those who either deny or worship the world do not have. For Christ rose with a body that was glorified and beyond decay and death; He could appear anywhere at will, be seen in any shape (e.g., that of a gardener or a traveler on the road to Emmaus), and even go through walls. See, e.g., Luke 24:13-35; John 20:15, 19. However, His glorified body was and is still based upon the body He had before. He still has the wounds of His crucifixion and, when He used important words or gestures, such the speaking name of Mary Magdalene, greeting His Apostles, or breaking bread, His disciples recognized Him. See, e.g., Luke 24:35; John 20:16, 19-20, 27. His Resurrection is the cause and the first promise of our own future resurrection; as He is, so we will be. See Catechism of the Catholic Church 655. For He said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has life eternal, and I will raise Him on the last day." John 6:54. And not only humans, but creation itself will be restored in glory. See Romans 8:19-23.

Our life on this earth should reflect these promises. We should neither reject our own physical life and the rightful loves of this life, as the Gnostics and Stoics would, nor worship them, as the materialists and Epicurians would. Rather, this earthly life, this earthly body, and our earthly activities are like a tent that will one day be folded up, but then made into a permanent Temple. See 2 Cor. 5:1-10. We are therefore careful with what we do in this life, how we treat each other and ourselves, not because our hopes are in this world, but rather because, as the Vatican II Council says, "When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise . . . according to the command of the

Lord and His Spirit, we will find them again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to His Father and eternal and universal kingdom.” Gaudium et Spes 39.