

Christ is Risen! Cristo ha resucitado! Si Cristo ay nabuhay!



We are celebrating this year what can only be described as a subdued, even sad Easter. As we look around our nation and our world, there seems to be a lot more Cross on offer than Resurrection. So many people in our country and throughout the world have died so suddenly from the pandemic, so many are grieving, so many have lost their jobs or their livelihoods.

Yet it seems to me that it is precisely in this moment that the necessity of proclaiming, “Christ is Risen!” is even more necessary than ever. He has overcome the bonds of sin and death, once and for all, that have held the human race captive to fear and despair. It is precisely in the face of so much suffering and grief, anxiety and uncertainty, that as Christians we need to affirm and celebrate the Lord’s resurrection with greater, not lesser fervor.

Even in the circumstances of social distancing and isolation that restrains us from gathering to celebrate the Easter Triduum, the most sacred days of the entire Year of Grace, joy and rejoicing is what is in order. On this Night of Nights, let us ask the Lord for authentic, heartfelt joy, not as a distraction to from the anguish around us or in disregard of the pain, fear and distress so many of our neighbors throughout the world are experiencing, (or that we ourselves may be feeling as well).

In this moment we find ourselves in, let us ask God to ignite in us rejoicing that blazes like the new fire at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil and which dispels the darkness and despair and hopelessness of this world.

Christ our light and our hope, is risen from the dead. We believe as Christians, that in baptism Christ's resurrection is our resurrection too, that we have been changed, transformed and transfigured in Christ, in this life and in the next.

A common misconception faith in the resurrection of Jesus is it is somehow a hypothesis, which, with sufficient information, it is possible to make a objective and dispassionate evaluation of the evidence and arrive at a reliable judgment. And that with enough evidence the answer will be obvious. But the resurrection of the Lord, while not contrary to reason and occurring within history, is also not a phenomenon among other phenomena.

Coming to faith in the Risen Lord requires a different way of knowing, which is to enter into the risen life of Jesus. Only then can we truly believe and rejoice that Christ is risen.

In Saint Luke's gospel he recounts how on the very day of Easter the disciples on the way to Emmaus already have a lot of data about the resurrection. They knew about the testimony of the women who discovered the empty tomb. They knew that the disciples had confirmed what the women had reported had seen. Christ himself, in the person of

the stranger, had patiently explained why the Messiah had to suffer and die and interpreted the scriptures for them, yet they still did not believe.

The disciples are not convinced by the evidence. It was only when they acted, only when they urged the stranger to stay with them and pressed him to share a meal, only when they put into action the new life of the gospel, were they able to recognize Jesus and come to believe that he was alive and in their midst.

Pope Gregory the Great, preaching on this gospel passage wrote:

“Let anyone who wishes to understand what he has heard be quick to fulfill in action what he has already been able to understand. The Lord was not recognized when he was speaking, but he deigned to be recognized when he was being fed.”

I think that our eyes are opened to Jesus when he makes himself known to us in our neighbors in need. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are able to recognize the Risen Jesus when we see their need and respond to it with generosity and self-giving and self-sacrificial love.

During this holy night, when we are sadly separated from each other, unable to gather for the Paschal Vigil, if we look with eyes of our hearts we can recognize so many ordinary but eloquent witnesses to the resurrection in our midst. Doctors, nurses and housekeeping staffs of hospitals risking their lives day after day to care for their patients. Police, firefighters and emergency medical techs bringing the sick from their homes to treatment. Grocery clerks and bus drivers working day-in and day-out doing what have suddenly become very dangerous jobs. Those working tirelessly in food pantries and homeless shelters to provide food and shelter to those in need. Thousands and thousands of ordinary women and men in our communities and in communities across the country sewing masks and protective clothing for health care workers. And people by the millions, who out of love for their elderly or vulnerable neighbors have isolated in their homes for weeks.

Before our eyes we can see, in the words of the Exsultet, a “fire divided yet not undimmed”, the Light of Christ shining in the darkness of this moment in the unheralded yet eloquent testimony of their deeds. Their actions reveal and are a participation in the transforming power of God’s love which is more powerful than death itself.

It is in our acts of hospitality and charity that we come to recognize Jesus alive and in our midst and so come to believe in the resurrection. Why? Because the works of mercy are what it means to live the resurrected life. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger and care for the sick and imprisoned we, who are the Body of Christ, and all those people of good will who join us, become the hands and heart of our Risen Savior.

The resurrected life of the works of mercy bid us to recognize alive in the neighbor, Jesus, who perhaps until then has been invisible or a stranger to us.

Sadly in this moment we are deprived of the Bread of Life and the Chalice of Salvation, broken and poured out for us. But we can rejoice that each time we break the bread of service to our neighbor in whatever way the present moment requires, we affirm that Christ, the Light of the World, is alive and active in our world.

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