

The Resurrection of Our Lord      4-16-2017      Col. 3      Mark 16: 1-8

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

One of the truly exciting times in the lives of young parents and not-so-young grandparents is when a child begins to move toward using language to communicate. Our daughter, Beth, got an early dose of saying daddy in the middle of the night, and my wife would simply chuckle and tell me to get up and go check on what she wanted. Many families can recall the very first word uttered by that little soul (and some imagined to have been spoken). Each parent wonders and secretly hopes it will be “mommy or daddy” as if the success of such a thing reflects on them, and of course in some respects it does for it happens within the context of family, care, and love. Nearly inseparable bonds are a part of those first linguistic encounters and quite often last a lifetime.

The Church, like human infants, also had its first words nearly 20 centuries ago, and those words have formed an un-dissolvable connection between God and His people. In Greek—Christos Anesti. In English—Christ is Risen!! Like the words spoken among family members in times of joy and sorrow, stress and ease, conflict and peace, they reflect the central binding truth that comes to make us who we are, and without the truth that gives rise to those words on our lips and in our hearts, we would not exist as a community. Why should that be so? Simply put without this reality it is death and not life that reigns when all is said and done. No society, no community can sustain itself without coming to terms with the power of the last enemy. We are singers of life, not death. Christos Anesti!!

The authors of the Gospels, each with unique nuances and voicing, make it clear that the 1<sup>st</sup> century was little different from our own time on one count. They knew the power of death and the fear it distilled in the human spirit. The women went to the tomb of Jesus early on the first day and by all rights they expected to be met by death. Each of the Synoptic Gospels has them ask one another, “Who will roll away the stone from the sepulcher for us?”. This phrase is not merely a question of mechanics or the physical weight of the seal on the tomb. Why would they have started such a journey without thinking about this in the first place? No, rather it is an anguished inquiry. It is a both a question and a statement about the insurmountable roadblock death poses for us all. Of all creatures on this earth we humans are the ones that can and must look ahead to our own mortality and end, and of all creatures we are unable to see beyond that blurry horizon. It is a mystery to us, and one that casts a shadow over all our endeavors. In fact we must wonder to what extent much of life in our time is lived trying to outlast or at least outrun this enemy. One commercial for a beer company talks about grabbing all the gusto you can, because you only go around once. We are a people driven to succeed and reach the top of our respective social settings and careers not only for the benefits we will receive, but because in some way we seem to feel we have to get what we can while we can. The ever present “drug culture” for all its social and psychological rationale appears to be driven by the need to get “high”, because life in its everyday expression is too much to bear. It is not only pleasure, but fear lurking behind these behaviors. We even go through an amazing attempt by morticians to disguise the reality of death with make-up and artistry. When my grandfather died and was in state a relative came up to me at the casket and said, “doesn't he look natural”? No he did not. In the words of the coroner from the movie

The Wizard of Oz, “he looked not only merely dead, but truly and sincerely dead”, and nothing on this earth would alter that.

So we come back around to those first words, the first song of the ancient Church, Christ is Risen. They point us to a truth that is the antidote for our fear and anxiety. They remind us that those fears are well founded ONLY when we try to make our way through life without God at the center. By the Resurrection we are offered an opportunity to walk, and maybe even skip a bit, through this life with all our limitations now knowing we belong to ONE greater than our fears. That is why today is such a welcomed guest and host in our midst. The Good News of Easter is the pronouncement of a love that will not allow death, anymore than sin, to come between us and God. It is a Divine Comedy because it has the most unexpected and joyful punch line. The Prince of Life has broken through the enemy's front line, and death now longer has final power over us.

Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of biological evolution was deathly afraid of snakes. The story is told that he used to go down to the London Zoo on a regular basis and stand in front of the display holding a Cobra. He would stick his foot out and tap on the glass until the snake, in agitation, would strike out at him. (apparently, he irritated more than people) He is said to have done this to try and face what frightened him and thus overcome the fear. The Christian faith does not taunt the enemy, but sees it through Christ's Resurrection. As Martin Luther once stated, “yes, death is still a serpent, but is now a serpent whose fangs have been pulled”.

The Church has for centuries used this day as a time to administer Baptism. The candidates would move through Lent in their preparation and come to Easter morning for the Sacraments. The reasons are clear: in Baptism we are linked to the death of Christ, BUT we are also linked to his resurrection. We are literally wrapped up in the words, Christ is Risen, and

you will be as well!! We are enclosed and participate in a great song, whose music plays in our hearts when fear might be present.

Loren Eiseley, in his book The Immense Journey, tells of an early morning spent in the woods. “I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in a long shaft of light... Outraged cries arose as a large raven took a nestling and devoured it. A soft complaint arose as birds of all varieties joined together in song. No one dared attack the raven, but they cried in some instinctive response. He had violated life and they knew it. He was a bird of death. The sighing died. It was then that I saw the judgment. It was the judgment of life against death... For in the midst of protest the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted. Then another and another took song until they sang together. They sang joyously until at last the raven, disoriented and confused was forgotten.” He was robbed of his power. They were singers of life, and not of death.

The Church has for centuries continued its very first words; words which the Father has written onto life. Christ is Risen and death will not hold sway. Today we add those first words to our lives.

We are singers of life; of the Resurrection. Christ is Risen. Amen+