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Easter Sunday – Year A (April 12, 2020)

Christ is risen!

Brothers and sisters, the joy of the Resurrection pervades this day and this whole week, and flows out in superabundance for fifty days until it is crowned in us by the Gift of the Holy Spirit. But the times, as they are, put a damper on our joy, and perhaps we even feel no joy at all, deprived as we are of the corporate worship of the Almighty in which these saving mysteries are made really present.

This detachment from the divine realities is itself a mystery. It is the mystery of our fallenness, and we can trace it back to the Garden of Paradise. It is found in the garden of the Lord's tomb, as well. We have been rendered inept at seeing things as they truly are. Even in the moment of our redemption, we still feel lost and bewildered. All of the accounts of the Resurrection are marked by the witnesses being dazed, confused, slow to understand, and even incredulous. And, true, Jesus does hand out some rebukes for lack of trust, but he always presents himself with care and understanding, guiding us on his way until we catch up to him and to reality. He asks Mary whom she is looking for. He calls her by name. He tells the disciples, "Peace. Be not afraid." He eats to prove he is alive. He draws out of the disciples on the way to Emmaus their assessment of things; he goes through scripture step by step, and he lets them ask him (yet unknown to their eyes) to eat with them.

We should expect nothing else now. The nations now as then are in tumult, as scripture would put it. And yet Christ rests in the tomb from his work of redemption. Christ's rising from the dead is hidden to unbelievers—those who rely on their own judgment. All the world bemoans that there is no solution to their ills, and they strive to derive one from their own hands. We ourselves are caught up in these appearances. We let *them* become our daily bread of sorrow. God's power over all things, the authority over life and death, is announced to us, is made *bread* for us. Do we notice? Do we understand? Do we believe? Rather, our reaction is just that of the disciples—a befuddled mess. And yet God in our midst (he's always there) is rebuking us, and guiding us by hand, by name, to the faith and joy he desires for us.

And what is the faith he desires for us? He wants us to view the world—and everything in it—through the lens of his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. That is the whole meaning of the Mass. It is the whole meaning of everything, except we're usually too blind to see it. We treat this lens as a trinket. We play around with it, looking at it from arm's length, and sometimes we see the world through it from that distance and notice how things look kinda neat in it. But it will not have its proper effect on us unless we put it up to our eyes and see clearly through it—see things as they truly are. We must call to mind these events and their meaning EVERY DAY. There is no substitute. There is no excuse. And so Jesus comes to us in our most trying moment and guides our hand with the lens up to our eyes.

This is the faith of the Passover of the Lord. Death was promised. Death was dealt. But for those with faith, life has been obtained—through death. What we now see, feel, hear, taste, smell is only temporary. Let us not get

caught up in it. Let it point us to the perfection of life—the resurrection we shall one day share with Jesus. There our joy will be complete, not here. But even now, calling to mind what Jesus achieved and the fact that he wants us to share in it, let us be moved to faith and joy. Jesus told the Apostles at the last supper, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) He says this to us now.

Let me conclude with the ending of St. John Chrysostom’s Paschal Homily, delivered every Pascha in the Byzantine churches:

Enjoy ye all the feast of faith: Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness. let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into Hell*, He made Hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry: Hell, said he, was embittered, when it encountered Thee in the lower regions. It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.

*Remember that as in the Apostle’s Creed, Hell can be taken to mean the abode of the dead before the Resurrection, rather than the Hell of the Damned.