

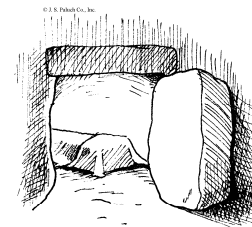
EASTER SUNDAY—2008 MARCH 23, 2008

FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

ACTS 10:24A, 37-43

1 CORINTHIANS 5:6B-8

JOHN 20:1-9



HE IS RISEN

If I were to ask you to rate your favorite Christian feasts, I would be willing to bet that at least eighty percent of you would rate Christmas as number one. I suspect that Ash Wednesday and Good Friday would receive a lot of votes, and many an Irishman would vote for St. Paddy's Day. While I am also sure that Easter would receive a fair number of votes their number would not correspond to the importance of this feast for us as Christians. One can easily understand the popularity of Christmas. It does involve a baby, and presents, but more than that there is this feeling of fellowship which the feast engenders that tugs at our heartstrings. It is in short a feast that makes most of us feel good. While that may not be said about Good Friday or Ash Wednesday, we understand that we are sinful men and women and we can understand the depth of love which is willing to sacrifice for another. Resurrection, however, although we might experience in the world around us every spring is not something that we've experienced in our own species. We don't personally know anyone who has actually risen from the dead. We may have encountered others, or had close friends who have had near death experiences, but unless we have had such an experience ourselves, we are somewhat at a loss to truly understand what resurrection involves, and while we may acknowledge Easter as the most important feast of our Christian calendar only one whose life is driven by Theology or who has a deep dependency on chocolate, marshmallow chicks and jelly beans will admit it as our favorite feast.

Yet, theologically and liturgically Easter is the most important feast of our year. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians that if Jesus was not raised from the dead then our faith is in vain. Pointedly during His life time Jesus said at least four times that He would rise from the dead even as He told His followers how He was to suffer and die after being handed over to evil men. His Resurrection then becomes the "proof" of all that Jesus said and taught. If the Father did not raise Him up, we would then have no reason to believe that He enjoyed the unique relationship with the Father that He spoke of so often, especially in John's Gospel.

But, what does Resurrection mean? Does it mean that in His Resurrection Jesus experienced resuscitation? Lazarus it seems was resuscitated. He was restored to his former

body, and his former life, and in the future had to experience death yet again. Like those who have had near death experiences who remain mortal and have not escaped death forever.

Jesus' Resurrection was not resuscitation. The Jesus who rose from the tomb was, it seems, quite different than the One who was placed there on Good Friday. He arose with a new and glorious Body, an immortal Body different from the One that was bruised and battered by the crown of thorns, the nails, the falls, and the whips. His resurrected Body was one that His Apostles did not recognize immediately, knowing Him only through His voice or familiar actions. His resurrected Body moved through locked doors and appeared and disappeared instantly. Yet, He seems still to enjoy both eating with them and providing them with food, food that was like Him, immortal. His resurrected Body did not again experience death, but simply receded into the sky as they looked on. His resurrected Body is one that we have never experienced and therefore it and His Resurrection we can only take on faith.

As difficult as it is for some to accept Christ's Resurrection, it is equally or even more difficult for some to accept His promise that His followers would also share in the resurrected life. In First Corinthians 12:35-41, Paul compares our earthly body to a seed, and our resurrected body to that which develops for the seed. A small seed can become a sunflower and an acorn an oak. The fruit is far grander than anything that was planted. Christ's Resurrection goes hand in hand with the promise of our own, and our own resurrection goes hand in hand with His.

In our first reading this morning Peter speaks to the crowds at Pentecost and reveals the effect the Resurrected Lord had on him. Having seen the Peter of Holy Thursday and Good Friday, we might find ourselves surprised if not shocked by the Peter who speaks today. So much has the experience of both the resurrected Christ and the coming of the Spirit changed him that the one who denied Christ, the one who deserted Him, and hid behind closed doors now not only boldly proclaims Christ innocence, but begins to follow the commission given the Apostles by the risen Christ.

Paul did not actually witness the Easter event, yet he talks about a transformation that takes place inside of us because of Christ's Resurrection and our baptism. We are, he says, no longer earth bound, but instead are destined to seek what is above because we were raised with the risen Christ.

John's Gospel this morning focuses on the empty tomb. This Gospel starts out on a sad note. Jesus is dead, and now His Body has disappeared. Peter and John run to the tomb, and as he looks inside, Peter remains puzzled and confused, but with John we have the first hint of

Easter joy. He saw and believed. Our passage ends with the statement that they still did not understand that He had to rise from the dead. With the end of this reading the only thing that we are completely sure of is that His followers knew that the tomb was empty. It takes the next forty days of living with the Risen Lord to begin to understand what Resurrection meant, not only in terms of Jesus but also in terms of what were the consequences of His Resurrection on them as they now seem full of a need to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen.

The story of Christ's Resurrection is one that we have heard countless times along with the various Resurrection appearances from Scripture. Those stories should mesh with our own stories of the resurrected Christ as we have experienced Him through our own prayer reflecting on Scripture, but also as we have each experienced the risen Christ who enters our lives in so many ways each day. The Christ who still feeds us, and heals us, and forgives, and teaches us as He patiently did with His Apostles after His Resurrection. In addition, however, is the little alluded to hope that Jesus promises us of our own resurrection, one modeled on His own where our bodies are transformed and glorified reflecting His risen Beauty.