

Easter Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

In the liturgy of the Catholic Church, EASTER Sunday - the solemnity commemorating the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ - is the greatest day: we ought to celebrate it with the most grateful love and joy. Because the resurrection of Our Lord, following his passion and his death on the cross, is the climax of our salvation history, the foundation on which our Christian faith rests.

The question of what Easter means was first answered by the Apostle Paul. For him, the Risen Lord was the heart and soul of Christianity; for him, Christ's resurrection is the source of which his teaching on Christian life constantly returns. Writing to the Corinthian neophytes he tells them, emphatically, that the resurrection of Christ is the basis of our faith and a pledge to all believers that they, too, would rise from the dead. Here is the keystone of his whole argument: "If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. If Christ was not raised, then our preaching is in vain, and so is your faith in vain. If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people" (I Cor., c.15) - Simply: upon this fact of the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a fact which is also a revealed mystery of faith, rests the validity of the entire Christian dispensation. If Christ had not risen from the dead, he would have been for us a good man, a great teacher and reformer, but only a man - not our Saviour.

With the resurrection of Christ, it is not only the hostile spiritual powers of evil which threaten man that have been beaten back, but it is also death itself that has been conquered. Needless to say, St. Paul, and the teaching of the Church after him, distinguish between what has been started and its perfection. Neither death nor the forces of evil have been definitely vanquished yet, in so far as this world goes. But the final victory has been solemnly proclaimed: the resurrection of Christ is the God-given assurance that the final victory will certainly be realized.

No doubt, the fact and mystery of the resurrection baffles and haunts the logic of human reason. Human experience finds no parallel for the resurrection. In truth, if any one fact in life is certain, it is the fact of death: all men must pay their debts to nature. The Church itself reminds man that to dust he shall return. The resurrection of the body from the dust is certainly a "hard saying"... - To have a clearer notion of it, the resurrection must be considered in the full context of salvation history, from the creation and fall of man, through the prophets up to the Incarnation and the passion of the Son of God made man in order to save us. We accept all this on the authority of God Who, by revealing it, has revealed his

merciful love, has given hope and strength to our faith and has granted us a pledge of our own resurrection. To quote again St. Paul: When we were baptized, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection.

The thousand and one difficulties so easily conceived about the "how" of this resurrection - that of Christ and that of man - show the imperfection of our knowledge and, ultimately, the limitations of the human mind. But they cannot set limits to the power of God Almighty, Who has revealed that the resurrection of Christ took place and that the resurrection of man will take place. Nor can they, by themselves and all together, constitute a real "doubt" for our faith. The doctrines and promise revealed by God are not mere pious hopes or sanctified guesses: they are eternal verities which give real meaning and true values to our lives, and which must be accepted, treasured and lived up to by us.

In the mystery of our salvation, from the beginning to the climax of the resurrection, Our Lord in a way also "revealed" man to man. Created in the image of God, man is the object of so much love and attention on the part of God: he becomes son of the Father by incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, and thus becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined to resurrection with Christ... In this light, how great must be the dignity of the human person, how great the values of the life of every human being! - This is the true nature and destiny of man, in our Christian faith, and no sounder foundation can be found on which to anchor all fundamental human rights and the universal obligation to protect the life of every human being, from its very beginning to the end.

My dear friends, since this is our Christian faith and our certain moral conviction, we must abide by it: that is, we must not only give it our unqualified intellectual ascent, but also conform to it our practical conduct, in our life of every day and in all issues which may confront it, whether private or public.

May God bestow on you his choicest blessings.

+ Peter Lei
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