

Easter Sunday

Year C, 2025

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 Col 3:1-4
Ps 118 Jn 20:1-9

This man God raised on the third day

Now that it is Easter, the time of fasting and penance is over. Lent is now behind us. We now rejoice and are glad in the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's resurrection from the dead is the defining moment for all of history, in all of history, in all of creation. Jesus's rising from death to be alive again is what changed everything for his disciples. He was not asleep, not in a coma. His body had been horribly abused, beaten, mutilated. He died. He was dead. And then he came to life again. That same body out of which life had gone and was no more, that same body, once dead, was now alive again. The same body. The same man. The same Jesus. Once dead. Now alive.

Jesus's rising from the dead was the confirmation of all he had spoken about and taught, of all he had done and sent others to do. This fact – that Jesus died and came back to life – became the basis of all Christian life, of all Christian preaching. This is what animated the Apostles and gave them new energy and purpose. This is what moved the disciples from fear to boldness, from doubt to faith. There is no greater miracle. There is no greater proof. What Jesus did by rising from the dead was the work of God.

And this is the content of the apostolic preaching found in the New Testament, especially in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul. What the Apostles were witness to – Jesus risen – this is what they proclaimed and preached, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter speaks and says:

We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:39-41).

And so we underestimate, to the detriment of our spiritual lives, what the resurrection of Jesus means, its importance as the foundation of Christian faith. It saddens me deeply that I once upset someone who has a great devotion to Christ's suffering and death, when, in one of my homilies, I compared and contrasted Jesus's death and his resurrection, reflecting on how it is only by Jesus's rising again can we understand what his dying meant. I may have said something like, "with all reverence due to the death of Jesus, it is a fact that all men die, and that some have died deaths just as horrible, just as cruel, just painful as Jesus. What distinguishes Jesus from all men is that, having died, he came to life again. This is what shows that he is not merely man, but also God. And only in the light of his coming back to life can we even begin to appreciate how unique was his dying, how tragic his

death, how unimaginable the depths of his suffering. But this only in light of the resurrection.”

The resurrection, you see, is the key to everything. It is as simple as this, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, then, today, twenty centuries later, in 2025, we would not know who he was. Period. We would not be who we are, not least of all Christians.

Had Christ not come back to life, there would be, *perhaps, maybe* be a bare historical trace of a man named Jesus having been a Jewish teacher-healer-prophet-rabbi who had been put to death by the Romans in Palestine at the insistence of the Jewish authorities. Historically, though, there had been others like Jeus around his time, quasi messianic figures put to death by Jewish or Roman authorities. Had Jesus not risen, his name, *maybe*, would have been listed alongside these obscure failed messiahs, whose names are known only by hyperspecialized historians of the late Roman period. The rest of the world, including us, would not know him, or his story, or his name anymore than we know the stories or the names of those other first-century Jewish messianic figures.

Had Jesus not risen from the dead, there would be no Christian faith, no Christianity. And the history of the past two thousand years would be much different, and the world today would be a very different place, especially in the Middle East and Europe and North and South America. This difference is not result of Jesus’s

birth, nor of his death. Jesus's unique place in human history is due solely to his rising again to life. Historically, this is indisputable.

It's hard to imagine the full implications of an alternative history where Jesus did not rise from the dead – what the world would look like today without a risen Jesus – but I wish someone would try, since it would help us to appreciate the immense importance of the resurrection, not only historically, but also theologically and spiritually.

As a man of faith, I am interested in the idea of what the world would look like if Jesus had not risen from the dead as I try to better understand the resurrection as *the* pivotal and definitive moment in all of history, in all of creation. As a man of our times, naturally, I immediately consulted the oracle that is the internet to ask that question. And as usual, I was disappointed with what I found there, but in a way that was also enlightening.

First, as I began to type the words “what if Jesus had never...” the search engine immediately suggested “been born.” That's telling, since that's mostly what people around the world would have already asked the internet. I quickly skimmed through a couple of the search results, but just as quickly I realized that this was not the right question. What distinguishes Jesus is not his birth or his death. It is his resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus is born and dies like any other human being. He is a man, like us in all

things but sin. It is his resurrection that changes everything, not his birth or his death.

But sure, if Jesus had never been born, there would be no Jesus and consequently, there would be no Christian faith, no Christian civilization, no Christian history, and the world would be a very different place. And yet, Jesus can still be born and die. But unless he rises, the result is the same as if he had not been born: no Christian faith, civilization, history. The resurrection is the key.

Then I completed typing my query into the search engine: “what if Jesus had never risen from the dead.” The top forty or so search results did not address the historical question but rather had to do with the questions raised by St Paul in chapter 15 of his first letter to the Corinthians, where he discusses the *theological* implications of saying that Christ was not raised from the dead. And those theological consequences are: 1) empty faith, meaning, without the resurrection, faith in Jesus and in his promises are a delusion; 2) empty preaching, meaning, without the resurrection, the preaching of the Apostles fails, and they are false prophets, false witnesses, giving false hope; and 3) we remain in our sin, meaning, without the resurrection, there is no atonement for and forgiveness of sin, death has not been conquered, there is no hope for eternal life, and we are and remain in a pitiable state, bereft of real hope and joy. And all this is true, what St Paul mentions as the *theological* consequences of denying the resurrection.

But what disappointed, and at the same time enlightened, me in these superficial internet searches – is that the results seem to suggest that the matter of Jesus’s birth has *historical* significance, while his resurrection has only theological or spiritual meaning. But this is not the case, and what I have been at pains to point out about the resurrection in this homily is that it is the pivotal and key moment, not only theologically and spiritually, but also historically.

Without the resurrection, we cannot understand the incarnation, the birth, the death of Jesus. It is the resurrection that proves and demonstrates who Jesus is: the beloved Son of the Father. It is by the resurrection that Jesus’s words about who the Father is and who he is and what the Father’s purposes are for the world are, are given authority and meaning and power. Without the resurrection, Jesus is a failed would-be messiah. Simply stated, without the resurrection, there is no Jesus to speak of who holds any lasting theological, spiritual, or historical interest. But history has proven otherwise and vindicates the resurrection as the moment of utmost importance!

And though these statements are strong, Jesus’s own words rise to confirm the truth of them and the importance of the resurrection. Of his being born, Jesus did not speak and say: I am the birth and the day. Of his dying, Jesus did not speak and say: I am death and night. But of his coming to life again after death, he said: “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25). *I am the resurrection*. Jesus is the

resurrection. He did not speak this way about his incarnation or his birth or his death. He identifies himself only with his resurrection. And it is only by the light of his glorious resurrection that we come to understand the rest: the incarnation, the birth, and the passion and death of Jesus.

So let no one, let no Christian ever doubt the reality and the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. This is what the Apostles preached: the resurrection of Jesus. This what we profess in faith every Sunday when we say the creed – that on the third day he rose again from the dead and that we believe in the resurrection of the body and life of the world to come. We make this statement of our belief every Sunday, which is the Lord's Day, the day of his resurrection! For he died on Friday, remained dead in the tomb on Saturday, the sabbath, and rose three days later, on the first day of the week, Sunday, which became his day, the day of the Lord, the day of resurrection.

This is the day the Lord has made. Today is resurrection day. Let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia. Amen.

Happy Easter!