

**The Lord has truly risen, Alleluia – This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia**

Dear Faithful,

It might be useful to consider three aspects of the Paschal mystery. This will help us to understand in general the role of Liturgy in making present the mystery we are celebrating to us.

**What are the three aspects of the Paschal mystery?**

To use simple terms we could call these the historical, the Liturgical and the personal.

**What is the historical aspect?**

The historical: Jesus died on a particular day in history; he died once and this will never be repeated again. Likewise, he rose from the dead three days later – once and for all – the book of Hebrews stresses this. In all the mysteries of Christ's life, be it his birth or transfiguration etc, these took place really and truly in the context of a particular time and place. Pope Emeritus Benedict emphasises that everything in our faith is centred upon this: that Christ really lived, really died and really rose from the dead – He was firmly rooted just like us in time and place. The events of his life happened historically just like any of those of his time. This is important because it by his deeds that Christ brought us salvation.

This explains the shock and surprise and general confusion of Easter Sunday – the women and the disciples were experiencing something that was new, and beyond their comprehension: a risen and glorified body, a body which had entered into history at the Annunciation and nativity and which as St. John says in his first letter they had touched and handled – but now somehow was glorified and transcended time and space – no wonder it took them time, no wonder that we should be in awe. It cannot be overemphasised that Christ's resurrection was not simply his body coming back to life as it had been, as for example Lazarus, if this had been the case the disciples may have been surprised but they would not have been dumfounded, after all they had seen Lazarus; No! It was a new mode of existence, beyond their comprehension and beyond their wildest imaginings.

**What is the Liturgical aspect?**

This is very important and if we grasp this, our spiritual lives will become much more meaningful. At the last supper, Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist and commanded us to continue to celebrate it. Why? Because it makes present to us the paschal mystery. The mystery of his passion, death, resurrection and ascension are “re-presented” on our altars. Thus, the role of Liturgy is to make present to us the unique and unrepeatable mystery of Christ. St. Ambrose writes talking about Christ “I find you in your mysteries.”

Fr. Aidan Nicholls writes that Christ's saving deeds are not simply to give us moral values or to inspire us to virtuous living, but they “have actually changed the terms on which the gift of human life is received from God” and have also reordered our origin, our goal and the support that we shall receive in life. What this means is that Christ's deeds in our very being affect our lives and therefore, they must be made continuously present to us – they are made present to us through the Liturgy. (Liturgy we may consider for the moment to be the Mass, the Sacraments and the Divine Office or Breviary that the clergy recite.)

For us in Eastertide, therefore, when we attend mass we are not only participating in the paschal mystery which we do whenever we attend mass, but also participating during this season in the particular mystery of Christ's Resurrection and the forty days that he spend with his disciples. It is as if we are there experiencing the same mystery that the disciples did. Now it may be objected that we do not see Christ as they saw him; that we do not talk with Christ as they talked with him; that we are not in the upper room when he appeared to them on Easter Sunday evening. True but what is important is not the historical happenings but the mystery beneath them – those are really and truly present to us, just as they were to the disciples. Indeed the Fathers teach that it is to our advantage since we can fully participate in them without the disadvantages of having to live with the experience at the time. Even for the disciples for the rest of their lives they would continue to live out these experiences through the Liturgy.

Psalm 94 says O that today you would listen to his voice, that today is continually present to us. It is a beautiful thought that in death we are going into the eternal day of Christ.

### **What is the personal aspect?**

Christ has ordained that he wishes to continue to live his life and his mysteries through us. We are called upon to live his life again, to bring him to the world. For example, when Christ was tired and thirsty by Jacob's well, he lived our tiredness and thirst, and so likewise when we bear tiredness, we are bearing Christ's tiredness in us. Even more profoundly, Christ asks that for the sake of his mystical body, the Church, we make up what is lacking in his sufferings. So our lives are truly redemptive because Christ is using us to bring salvation to people. So we must enter into the mysteries, ponder them, continually chew on their meaning so that they become part of us and inform us.

### **An example of the episode of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (luke 24:13-35)**

If we try and give a concrete example it might help. The episode of the two disciples walking to Emmaus and Jesus falling in with them on the journey happened historically, it was an event just like any other event such as the royal wedding. Now through its presentation in scripture in the Liturgy, we are drawn into the journey, we are there and Christ is walking by our side. We ponder how our eyes are held, how when we suffer we at times forget that this must be on the road to the resurrection; also, how we too meet Christ in scripture and the mass. Lastly, we then absorb that into our present lives, we live like the disciples reinvigorated and bring the good news of Christ's appearance to others.

During his forty days on earth Christ appeared at different times and places, each one has a very important message for us.

1. It is worthwhile to study the four gospels and St. Paul (1 Cor 15:3 ff) and work out the different appearances: Mary Magdalen, the women at the tomb, Disciples on the way to Emmaus, Peter, the appearance in the upper room are the ones on Easter Sunday – not forgetting Our Lady which is not in scripture.
2. In order to be vigilant in guarding and deepening our life with Christ, do we make an examination of conscience each day and see where we need to strengthen our defences? 1 Cor 5:8 urges us to purge out the old leaven which is our sins, faults and failings.
3. Do we prepare for the Sunday Liturgy by reading the passages of scripture by considering the theme of the mass?
4. Some interesting Scripture passages : 1 Peter Chpt 1 Look closely at this chapter as it contains excellent advice on our lives and what is happening to us. It is a very rich chapter and shows the new life that was earned by the Christ's blood; it also points out that we too have to undergo trial in this life and therefore we must be mentally prepared for action and obedient. Revelation 5:1-14 show our redemption; Christ can open the scroll and seven seals which are the curses that had not been yet lifted from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy) Notice too we must continually give glory and the best way is the Mass.

God bless and may He give us spiritual joy and hope after his conquest of death and sin.



Father Dominic O'Connor