

Easter Sunday

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Assuming that Jesus' crucifixion occurred in A.D. 30, Paul (Saul) was converted in A.D. 33 and came to Jerusalem from his preaching in Damascus around A.D. 36. If the Acts of the Apostles is arranged in chronological order, today's event occurs after Paul's meeting with Peter in Jerusalem. What we hear of today is the inauguration of the mission to the Gentiles. Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment, has had a vision and in this vision an angel has told him to send to Joppa (Jaffa) and summon a man named Simon who is called Peter. About noon the following day, Peter also had a vision in which he saw heaven opened and all kinds of animals which he is told to kill and eat. Peter replies "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" so we can assume that the animals were considered by the Jews to be ritually unclean and therefore forbidden. The voice in Peter's vision says "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This vision occurs three times and leaves Peter wondering what it means when Cornelius' emissaries arrive. Peter accompanies the emissaries back to Cornelius and once Cornelius recounts his vision, Peter realizes the meaning of his own vision, saying "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." Cornelius has been expecting Peter and has called together his relatives and close friends; there is quite a crowd gathered.

^{34a} Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, ["You know]

Peter presumes that these gentiles have heard the message of Christ; a message which he will repeat as his teaching. Some commentaries presuppose that "the people" do not know this story and that the comment "you know" (actually contained in verse 36) is addressed to the Christian reader of Acts; a presupposition which is unwarranted in my opinion.

³⁷ what has happened all over Judea,

Judea is controlled by the Romans and all the goings-on there are familiar to the centurion.

beginning in Galilee

This is the same formula used by the Sanhedrin when they accused Jesus in front of Pilate (Luke 23:5).

after the baptism that John preached, ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.

See Luke 3:21-23.

He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹ We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and (in) Jerusalem.

All the way from Galilee to Jerusalem.

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

A figurative expression for crucifixion. Deuteronomy 21:23 says that anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed by God. Jesus bore the curse of the covenant for us because we were unable to offer the perfect sacrifice which would atone for the sins of the people.

⁴⁰ This man God raised

The resurrection is ascribed to the Father.

(on) the third day

The number three in Hebrew numerology is the number of completion. The world was formed in the first three days of creation and filled in the second three days of that same creation event (Genesis 1). Isaac was restored to life (resurrected) in the eyes of Abraham on the third day when God stopped the sacrifice and substituted a ram instead (Genesis 22:2-12).

and granted that he be visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance,

The witnesses to the resurrection were not indiscriminate or accidental.

who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

A true resurrection, a ghost does not eat and drink.

⁴² He commissioned us

Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20.

to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as

Up until this time, the actions of the Apostles have been restricted to the Jews; now Peter is addressing Gentiles for the first time.

judge of the living and the dead.

This role of Jesus is presented again in Acts 17:31. This role will be exercised by the Risen Jesus, precisely as "the Christ".

⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him

Belief is more than just acceptance, it is total commitment; not to a concept, but to Jesus Himself.

will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

The name is the authority. Jesus was given full authority by His Father and He gave that authority to the apostles and their successors. The ambassador speaks in the "name" of the one whom he represents. Remember the old police shows where they would say "Stop in the name of the law"? The policeman was invoking the authority which he represented.

2nd Reading - Colossians 3:1-4

This reading is a practical application of the teaching given in the earlier chapters of Colossians, designed to suit the circumstances that have arisen in the Colossian church.

By His death and resurrection the Son of God frees us from the power of Satan and of death. "By baptism men are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ; they die with Him and rise with Him" (Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium, 6).

In other words, Christians have been raised to a new kind of life, a supernatural life, whereby they share, even while on earth, in the glorious life of the risen Jesus. This life is at present spiritual and hidden, but when our Lord comes again in glory, it will become manifest and glorious.

Two practical consequences flow from this teaching -- the need to seek the "things that are above", that is, the things of God; and the need to pass unnoticed in one's everyday work and ordinary life, yet to do everything with a supernatural purpose in mind. This means that those who try to seek holiness by imitating Jesus in His hidden life will be people full of hope; they will be optimistic and happy people; and after their death they will share in the glory of the Lord: they will hear Jesus' praise, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21).

¹ If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,

This contrasts "things that are above" and "things that are on the earth".

where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Taken from Psalm 110:1, this shows His position of Lordship and complete victory.

² Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. ³ For you have died,

In baptism, we die to sin and are raised in Christ.

and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The Christian is no longer attached to the material things of this life, but to the spiritual things of a life in Christ.

⁴ When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

Although St. Paul's main emphasis throughout has been on the present resurrection with Christ in baptism, this is a reference to the future resurrection at the end of time.

Alternate 2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

Unlike the Gospels, where leaven is a symbol of the inner dynamism of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21), St. Paul here uses it as a metaphor for the corruptive influence of evil (Galatians 5:9). St. Paul uses examples taken from the Jewish celebration of the Passover and feast of unleavened bread. The Passover is the principal Jewish feast, and its central rite is the eating of the Passover lamb. At the Passover meal, and on the 7 days following, which were also feast days (the feast of unleavened bread), the eating of leavened bread was forbidden. In Exodus 12:15,19 God laid it down that during these days no leaven should be kept in Jewish homes.

^{6b} Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?

The little yeast which is added to the dough doesn't cause pimples on the loaf, it causes the entire loaf to rise.

⁷ Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.

A reference to the feast of unleavened bread, of which the Passover was the first day. It represents a new beginning.

⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The Church is always engaged in a Paschal celebration, because Christ by His death and resurrection has accomplished the salvation foreshadowed in the Exodus. We are lead from slavery to sin into the promised eternal kingdom and during our journey we are sustained by the bread which comes down from heaven, the Eucharist. Sincerity (single-mindedness or purity of intention) and truthfulness should distinguish the Christian.

Gospel - John 20:1-9

None of the Evangelists describes the actual resurrection itself, for it was witnessed by no one. The gospels and 1 Corinthians 15:4-7 witness to the fact of the resurrection, however, by the testimony to the empty tomb and the appearances of the Risen Christ to His disciples. It is fitting that on Easter morning we should hear an account of what happened on that first Easter morning as Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

¹ On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.

All the Gospel accounts are in substantial agreement concerning the time when the tomb was first found to be empty, before dawn on Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene is named also by Matthew

and Mark along with companions; Luke gives no names but speaks of “women” in the plural. In this verse John seems to make it appear that Mary Magdalene was alone but this is not necessarily the case as we will see in the next verse.

² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved,

Mark 16:7 relates that the women were told to announce the resurrection to Peter and the other disciples; John is the only evangelist to single out the beloved disciple (himself).

and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

The fact that she say “we don't” would make it appear that She wasn't alone at the tomb, but was in fact accompanied by other women.

³ So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. ⁴ They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; ⁵ he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.

No reason is given for John's remaining outside the tomb; given the amazing/distressing news that he and Peter had come to investigate. It is assumed that he did not enter because Peter was the leader of the apostles and as such it was his responsibility to lead the investigation.

⁶ When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there,

The Greek participle translated here seems to indicate that the wrappings were flattened, deflated, as if they were emptied when the body of Jesus rose and disappeared -- as if it had come out of the wrappings without their being undone, passing right through them (just as He later entered the Upper Room when the doors were shut). One can readily understand how this would amaze a witness, how unforgettable the scene would be.

⁷ and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.

This head cloth would have been tied, rolled like a triangular bandage, under the chin and over the top of the head to secure the mouth in a closed position. The first point to note is that it was not with the other wrappings, but placed to one side. The second, even more surprising thing is that, unlike the clothes, it still has a certain volume, like a container, possibly due to the stiffness given it by the ointments: this is what the Greek participle, here translated as "rolled", seems to indicate. From these details concerning the empty tomb one deduces that Jesus' body must have risen in a heavenly manner, that is, in a way which transcended the laws of nature. It was not only a matter of the body being reanimated as happened, for example, in the case of Lazarus, who had to be unbound before he could walk (see John 11:44).

⁸ Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.